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Knowledge management and the codification of knowledge in the UK Post Office

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the concept of knowledge codification in the context of Knowledge Management (KM) in an organisation. In the KM literature, codification of knowledge into information is viewed as central to the notion that knowledge can be managed and transferred. However, such literature pays little attention to knowledge codification as a *process*, or to the complex issues which the concept of codification raises. The research therefore examines processes of knowledge codification in an organisation, and how codification plays a part in its emerging approach to Knowledge Management.

The empirical research was conducted within the internal consultancy section of the UK Post Office, using a methodology of participant observation within the Knowledge Management consultancy group. The data were collected predominantly from participation in a KM project: This aimed to capture knowledge from consultants working on an overseas consultancy project, and to transfer their knowledge elsewhere in the Post Office through the medium of codified text.

The research has gained in-depth insight into an organisation's approach to Knowledge Management, and generated significant findings about knowledge codification as a process. In particular, the analysis focuses on different levels of social interaction in which the processes of knowledge codification occurred, and finds that codification involves more than just the codification of knowledge into information: Codification also involves the process of defining the codes needed to codify knowledge. However, the codified knowledge will have limited transferability to individuals or groups who do not share the underlying knowledge and experience to enable them to *decodify* the codes similarly. The thesis therefore concludes that further research is needed to bring attention to the importance of knowledge *decodification* within the Knowledge Management discourse.

I should like to convey my sincerest thanks to my supervisors Dave Wield and Paul Quintas for their unwavering support, inspirational supervision and downright hard work on my behalf.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Research context

This thesis is about codification of knowledge in the organisation, within a broader context of knowledge management. There are two questions which immediately leap out of such a statement: What is ‘codification of knowledge’ and what is ‘knowledge management?’ It is a broad aim of this thesis to address these two questions, so by way of orienting the thesis, they are considered immediately. As knowledge management is the broader context from which the theme of knowledge codification emerges, it makes sense to talk first about what is meant by knowledge management - or Knowledge Management.

If this last bit was read aloud to someone else, they might think it sounded odd to repeat the words knowledge management and Knowledge Management. It might sound less strange if they were told that it was written once with capital letters and once without, whereas to the reader of the written text, the distinction is more obvious. The use of capital letters is an example of a code contributing to how we communicate, but only in the written language. When *talking* about Knowledge Management with capital letters, we could say KM.

The point of making this distinction is not only to signal the use of a code, but also to introduce a difference between how this thesis uses the terms Knowledge Management - or KM - and knowledge management. While the capital letters are intended to bestow a sense of formality and implicit social recognition on what this thesis characterises as the ‘KM phenomenon’, ‘knowledge management’ is intended to convey a sense of practice, of what is being done in organisations by way of managing knowledge.

The ‘Knowledge Management phenomenon’ refers to the surge of discussion and activity around the notion that knowledge should be an important focus of management. This began

escalating rapidly in the mid 1990s both in practice and within the literature (Quintas, 2001).

The frenzy of interest is graphically illustrated by Swan (1999, p.3), where an analysis of references to 'Knowledge Management' in a leading index of management-related literature showed more made in the first six months of 1998 than cumulatively in the previous five years.

Why this interest suddenly started happening is an interesting and complex question which is considered in the following chapter, but broadly, the gradual shift of focus on knowledge as something to be managed is associated with the emergence of concepts such as the 'post-industrial society' (Bell, 1974), 'knowledge workers' (Drucker, 1992), 'knowledge production' (Machlup, 1980; Gibbons et al., 1994) and the 'information age' (Castells, 1996).

It is important to situate the thesis in this context of KM as an emerging phenomenon, in order to appreciate how importantly the notion of knowledge management was perceived within the broader management discourse at the time, and how a whole host of initiatives, approaches and practical applications were being launched to bring knowledge management about. But underneath the rhetoric of the importance of knowledge and Knowledge Management, what is being practised as knowledge management? What are managers actually doing to manage knowledge?

Approaches to knowledge management are characterised by Roos and Von Krogh (1996), Sveiby (1996), Quintas et al (1997), Alvesson and Kärreman (2001), and Swan and Scarborough (2001a; 2001b) as broadly coalescing around two perspectives on knowledge. One perspective treats knowledge – or more significantly 'knowing' (Blackler, 1995) – as a human process which occurs between people in social networks, characterised by Swan et al (1999) as the 'community' perspective. Another perspective treats knowledge as a reifiable object, capable of being packaged up, owned and passed around, characterised as the 'cognitive' (Swan et al, 1999) or 'cognitivist' (von Krogh, 1998) perspective. Practical approaches to knowledge management thus tend to broadly focus on either the relationships between people, or on the

relationships between people and information, characterised by Hansen et al (1999) as 'personalization' and 'codification' strategies.

The so-called cognitive perspective on knowledge is also redolent of what Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) and Cohen (1998) claim is an epistemological predisposition in the West towards achieving a 'Cartesian split' (Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995) between knower and known, unlike Eastern cultures which do not place pre-eminence on such 'explicit' knowledge. On the same theme, Blackler (1995) says that in the West codified knowledge enjoys a 'privileged status.'

That codification is viewed as a process of 'objectifying' knowledge is also apparent in the discourse on the 'tacit' and 'explicit' dimensions of knowledge. Codification is seen by some as a process of explicating 'tacit' knowledge (e.g. Teece, 1986; Cowan and Foray, 1997; Saviotti, 1998). The terms 'codified' and 'explicit' are treated as synonymous by others. For example, in the UK Government's 1998 Competitiveness White Paper, *Building the knowledge driven economy*,¹ we are told that there are "two types of knowledge; 'codified' and 'tacit.'" Also, Nonaka and Takeuchi's (1995) index entry for 'codified knowledge' says see 'explicit knowledge.' Quintas et al (1997, p.389) treat knowledge which can be made explicit as 'codifiable knowledge,' while Dutrenit (2000, p.41) treats tacit knowledge as 'non-codifiable.'

Codification also appears to be associated with the concept of knowledge capture and the use of information and communications technologies (ICTs), perhaps through an affinity with the translation of knowledge into computer code (Steinmueller, 2000; Cohendet and Steinmueller, 2000). Literature on information systems and ICT-based approaches to knowledge management tends to treat codified knowledge as transferable by computers (Roberts, 2000). Many ICT-based knowledge management initiatives involve codification. At Arthur Andersen for example,

¹Our competitive future: Building the knowledge driven economy, Dec. 1998. Downloaded from http://www2.dti.gov.uk/comp/competitive/an_repr

the 'Global Best Practices' database involves "capturing and codifying lessons learned and knowledge of best practice" (Finerty, 1997).

The codification of knowledge, would therefore appear to be both explicitly and implicitly associated with this 'cognitive' view which emphasises the creation and management of something objectifiable. Indeed, in Scarborough and Swan's (2001a) summary of this perspective, codification is characterised as a process alongside capture, storage and distribution. Within the practical prescriptions for managing knowledge in the management literature, the concept of knowledge codification is also associated with the objectification and 'movement' of knowledge. For Ruggles (1997, p.2), for example, "knowledge codification is the capture and representation of knowledge so that it can be re-used either by an individual or an organisation." Similarly for Davenport and Prusak (1998, p.69) "the purpose of codification is to put knowledge in a usable form." Baumard (1999, p.21) claims that "rather than managing knowledge, organizations manage its codifications."

This thesis identifies a fundamental gap in the understanding of codification in the organisational and management literature. It argues that the complexity of codification as a concept is not widely understood, and that the *process* is ignored in preference for discussing codified knowledge as a product (e.g. Zack, 1999) or is discussed as unproblematic in the wider social and organisational context (e.g. Zander and Kogut, 1995; Cohendet and Steinmueller, 2000; Cowan et al, 2000). The treatment of codification in the knowledge management literature (particularly Ruggles, 1997; Davenport and Prusak, 1998; and Zack, 1999) appears to focus on the 'movement' of the codified product - taking the codified knowledge to its 'users.' Furthermore Davenport and Prusak claim that "since the purpose of codification is to put knowledge in usable form, the corporation needs some idea of what uses it has in mind" (p.69), and "once found, someone must evaluate the knowledge to assess its usefulness and importance to the organization ..." (1998, pp.69-70). Who does this, how do they do it and what processes are involved are surely important questions to ask.

Saviotti (1998) reminds us that “codification is ... better described as a process rather than an intrinsic property of a piece of knowledge.” In order to understand the concept of knowledge codification, it is therefore important to recognise that there are people involved in processes of codifying knowledge, and that these processes need to be understood.

1.2 Defining words and concepts

1.2.1 What is codification?

We have already seen broadly how the concept is applied to knowledge in the organisational and management literature. However, for a full understanding it is necessary to go back to first principles in order to understand what the word ‘codification’ means. Then it is possible to think about how codification applies to knowledge.

A useful place to start for a definition of the term is a dictionary. A reasonably contemporary overview can be found in Webster’s Third New International Dictionary.² The term codification stems from the verb ‘to codify’ which is given as ‘to arrange systematically into a code.’

Codification can refer to both the state and process of codification. There is also the related verb ‘to code.’ The root of the term modern term code is from the Latin codex, which was an original form of book fashioned from a tablet of wood.

The term ‘code’ is shown to be fairly diverse in its various forms, which are summarised and adapted from Webster’s in Figure 1.1. From the characterisation of codes given in Figure 1.1, it can be seen that codes have two broad aspects: Codes define boundaries of morality and behaviour, which is essentially a social aspect; and codes, as a form of language, enable communication, both in social and technical systems. Codes can also therefore be thought of in

² Webster’s Third New International Dictionary. Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica Inc; 1986

terms of social aspects - underpinning processes of human interaction - and technical aspects - enabling interaction between machines. It is interesting also to note that the etymology of code has evolved from its original derivation as a written codex, to forms which clearly do not necessarily need to be written. Moral or ethical codes are cases in point, as are languages, which can either be written or spoken.

The treatment of all languages as forms of code may be difficult to conceptualise, especially as the types of encoded language with which most people are familiar, e.g. secret codes or Morse code, sit on top of existing language structures. For example, Morse code is only usable in languages using the Roman alphabet, and is only comprehensible if those using it understand the same language. However, this argument can be extended simply through musical notation, to English, French or any other language, to illustrate that language is a basic form of code, rendering communication intelligible only between people who know the code and are able to decipher it. The use of codes is therefore a significant aspect of the communication process.

Figure 1.1 Types of code (over page)

Figure 1.1 Types of code

- a written collection of statutes and laws. *Example:* the Napoleonic Code
- any of various systems or collections of principles, rules or regulations that do not constitute a legal code
 - ~ a set of traditional rules of conduct that are considered morally binding upon the individual as a member of a particular group; broadly, customary socially acceptable behaviour.
Examples: a moral or ethical code, a dress code
 - ~ a set of rules for or standard of professional practices or behaviour set up by an organised group. *Example:* a code of practice, a code of conduct
- any system of symbols for meaningful communication
 - ~ a system of symbols for mechanically conveying information. *Examples:* Morse code, semaphore, smoke signals
 - ~ a system of symbols designed primarily to restrict comprehension to particular individuals, often used to secure brevity as well as secrecy. *Example:* secret code
 - ~ language conceived as a stock of signals from which the speaker or writer chooses certain ones with which to convey a message
 - ~ a system of symbols for introducing information and instructions into an automatic computer or tabulating machine. *Example:* Binary code

This discussion will not be at all new to a semiotician - an advocate of semiotics as a field of textual analysis - who is fundamentally interested in the social construction of signs and their meanings, and the ways in which these signs are combined into codes. Semiotics shows that social and behavioural codes occur in many different forms and that the study of these can be

quite complex (see for example, Chandler, 2002). This thesis is not about semiotics, which does not address the codification of knowledge per se. Semiotics is also concerned with the nature of social and cultural knowledge, which is much broader than the organisational and management context, which is the focus of this thesis.

However, semiotics does go some way to explain what it is about language and behaviour which are conceptually linked by the use of codes: Codes have a quintessentially social function, where identity with codes, use of common codes, and the ability to understand the same code, is in one sense what defines the social unit. For example:

- nation-states may be defined by laws, constitutions, languages or religious codes
- societies or communities may be defined by languages and their regional variations, and bounded by codes of morality or behaviour
- professions are delimited by codes of practice, for example, medical practitioners are bound by the Hippocratic oath

Similarities can be seen in the firm as a unit of social organisation. For example, employment contracts and company rules and regulations are coded tools of management; business standards, business processes and handbooks serve to guide and enforce working behaviours; while the pervasive use of jargon and acronyms are only intelligible within the organisation. The point is to illustrate that there is a social dimension to codes, in terms of who understands them and who identifies with them.

But what about *codification*? This was defined in the dictionary as to ‘arrange systematically into a code’ so it was first necessary to discuss the nature of codes. However, the term ‘code’ conveys something static, whereas Chandler (2002) introduces the term ‘codification’ to convey the *process* whereby codes and conventions associated with them are established.

Although this thesis is not about semiotics or about communication, the discussion has opened up some important aspects to the concept of codification:

- Codification can occur in both verbal and written forms
- Codification is a process
- Codification has a social dimension

1.2.2 What is knowledge codification?

This thesis is about the codification of knowledge in the context of knowledge management in the organisation. In the opening section of this chapter, knowledge codification is seen as a key theme in the notion that knowledge needs to, and can, be managed. Codification is also both implicitly and explicitly linked to a view of knowledge as something to objectify, and thus codification is seen as a way of objectifying knowledge. It is clearly a fundamental concept in how we communicate our knowledge. Codification can occur verbally as well as in text. It is argued that irrespective of whether knowledge can be ‘transferred’ or ‘shared’ by this route, people nevertheless codify their knowledge as one way of demonstrating it, displaying it or otherwise communicating it. However, this thesis is not about how we communicate our knowledge, it is about the codification of knowledge in the context of knowledge management. But why adopt the term codification? There are other concepts and words which can be used to describe how knowledge comes ‘out’ of people, for example, expressing, explicating or articulating (Sanchez, 1997) might do the same job. Unlike these other words, the discussion of codes suggests that the codification of knowledge has a social dimension where ability to understand and identify with the code is an important aspect to how knowledge ‘moves’ between people. As Cowan and Foray (1997) suggest, “knowledge is easier to codify and codified knowledge is easier to diffuse within a community of agents who can read the codes.”

There are other words associated with codes which could be used. Coding, for example, is often used with reference to the application and use of codes in data analysis, where the code is a schema or index for the purpose of linking common data in relationships (Baumard, 1999). Coding can thus be seen as a codification process. Codifying knowledge would appear to be richer than this, involving the generation and development of codes to describe knowledge rather than simply their application. While it feels misplaced to talk about knowledge codes, there is no such difficulty in talking about knowledge codification.

The other related term is 'encoding,' commonly used in semiotics. This is also the term used by Blackler (1995) in his useful typology of the 'locations' of knowledge in the organisation drawn from the organisational studies literature and developed from earlier work by Collins (1993). Blackler maintains that knowledge can be embrained, embodied, encultured, embedded and encoded. A fuller discussion is made of this framework in the following chapter, but concentrating on 'encoded' knowledge for now, Blackler describes this as "information conveyed by signs and symbols," which he draws from what Collins (1993) terms 'symbol-type' knowledge. Blackler and Collins both suggest that encoded knowledge has become particularly problematic in the light of a growing use of computers, and therefore deserves particular discussion. They both suggest that 'symbol-type' knowledge has an intimate association with - and is a manifestation of - the other forms of knowledge. Blackler (1995) in particular, develops the idea that encoded knowledge is ubiquitous, and occurs at different levels of social interaction in the relationship between individual and organisation.

While this is a particularly useful framework for understanding where knowledge may be located or 'captured' (in a passive sense) in organisations, Blackler did not seek to go into the process aspects of this typology of knowledge. In discussing the nature of 'encoded' knowledge, the framework is not able to address what is involved in *encoding* - or in the words of this thesis, *codifying* - knowledge in organisations. This thesis therefore engages in this issue of the

knowledge codification as a process. Blackler's typology has thus been important in highlighting the need to research *processes* of knowledge codification as they are *actually* occurring in an organisation.³

Having established why this thesis adopts the term codification, it is necessary to quickly return to the question of what is knowledge codification. The discussion so far has given some indications of what might characterise the codification of knowledge in the context of knowledge management in organisations. A broader aim of the thesis is to explore and open up the concept of codification in the organisational and management context. However, a useful working definition for knowledge codification is given by Cowan and Foray (1997, p.596) as;

“the process of conversion of knowledge into messages which can then be processed as information.”

This definition also serves to note an important distinction between knowledge and information which is discussed in the following section.

1.2.3 What is knowledge?

It is important, as the subject matter of this thesis is the codification of knowledge in the context of knowledge management, to be clear about how the term 'knowledge' is used in the thesis. It is therefore important to discuss the epistemological perspective which has been guiding the thesis. It is also necessary to be aware that other people have different views on knowledge, and that these will be encountered in the research.

³ It should be noted that this research uses Blackler to identify the importance of looking at knowledge codification as a process. However, the research did not set out to look at the relationship between codified knowledge and Blackler's other 'types' of knowledge, nor did the research methods incorporate this objective.

From an epistemological perspective, this thesis takes knowledge to be what we as individuals know, and that what we know is socially constructed - that is, our knowledge is a construction based on our own unique experience of the world around us. Our knowledge is shaped by our socialisation, in other words, in the social and cultural context of our upbringing and development. This is a complex subject which enters the fields of developmental and social psychology, and is therefore beyond the focus of this thesis. However, the socially constructed nature of knowledge is clear in how people interpret information in different ways. In the current crisis in Afghanistan, for example, the Taliban would inevitably see a BBC news broadcast as highly propagandist, whereas in the UK what the BBC says is widely seen as representing the 'truth.'

In such a constructivist perspective, it does not make sense to talk about knowledge being 'transferred' per se. One person's knowledge does not become someone else's simply by virtue of delivering a lecture, demonstrating how to ride a bike, or telling someone how to knead bread, for example. As individual knowers we communicate our knowledge, and may act upon it according to a complex variety of reasons and circumstances. We can say that the knowledge we communicate between each other passes as information. In the words of Orna (1999) "information is what human beings transform knowledge into when they want to communicate it to other people."

The relationship between knowledge and information was articulated clearly by a colleague⁴, who is quoted in Figure 1.2.

⁴ Many thanks to Rose Armson (Systems Dept., Open University) who wrote to me early in the research.

Figure 1.2 KNOWLEDGE & INFORMATION

I assume that *information* is fairly clear cut. I don't get into difficulties if I think of it as a reified entity, *vis*, I can transfer it to you, although unlike most types of 'thing' I can still keep it myself even if I give it to you (like a disease!). I have no difficulties with the notions of *information management*.

Knowledge is much more interesting. I've given it a lot of thought over the years, stimulated often by some students' models of the relationship between teacher and student, teaching and learning. Lots of students seem to carry the notion that my job as a teacher is to lift the lid off their head, pour in the knowledge and then put the lids back. Another metaphor that comes to mind is I am expected to cook the knowledge into some sort of digestible form and then to feed it to them so that they can eat it and then have the knowledge too.

It's very obvious to me that this sort of model doesn't work. Partly because as a teacher in Higher Education I'm not just teaching knowledge but skills, attitudes and approaches which will be transferable to contexts I can't begin to imagine. All I can do is organise a number of experiences in which the student encounters the information, and which facilitate the student in entering into a relationship with the information by accommodating it into their own cognitive structures. Knowledge, it seems to me, emerges from the relationship between the information and the student's (in this case) experience, expectations, mental models, and practice.

Finally an observation which indicates the social nature of knowledge. In a sense there is difficulty *not* talking about knowledge as something objective - essentially the term 'knowledge' represents the ontological dimension to the knowing process. This may be a fundamental manifestation of what Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) describe as a Cartesian philosophical tradition in the West, which seeks to separate the knower from what is known. Moreover, while English has a limited capacity to express the different forms of knowing, other

languages have different words for what is being known, for example, knowing what, knowing who, or knowing how. It would appear that we are constrained by our language. These observations point to a socialised dimension to how we talk about knowledge and knowing.

1.3 Thesis stance

This section makes some important statements about the stance taken in the thesis towards the treatment of, and relationship between, key concepts in the research. The stances have been developed in the previous discussion, and also developed from the more detailed discussion about knowledge codification in the following chapter. These statements are akin to Yin's (1994) recommendation to develop theoretical propositions to guide the research process, and it should be noted that these statements were set up to guide the research, not as theoretical propositions for testing in the thesis:

- **Explicit knowledge and codified knowledge are not always the same**

The term explicit knowledge arose when Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) juxtaposed it with Polanyi's (1958, 1967) concept of a 'tacit' dimension to how we know. Codification may be one way of making knowledge explicit, but there is no reason to suppose that codification is the only way to make knowledge explicit.

- **Knowledge codification and knowledge capture are not always the same**

The concepts of knowledge codification and capture are often treated synonymously. Blackler's (1995) framework suggests that codifying is one form in which knowledge can be captured. Knowledge codification may occur in an organisational context for other reasons than capturing knowledge.

- **Codified knowledge is also information**

Codification is what links knowledge and information. Information is essentially knowledge which has been codified. We can say it is knowledge from the perspective of the person who codified it, and we can say it is also information because other people may pick it up and use it in some way. However, codified knowledge does not become someone else's knowledge simply by virtue of handing them information. Alternatively we can say that the codification of knowledge is also the construction of information.

1.4 Aims of the research and research questions

Aims

- to explore and understand better the concept of knowledge codification in the context of knowledge management in the organisation
- to examine processes of knowledge codification as they are actually occurring in an organisation grappling with ideas about knowledge management
- to examine who is involved in processes of knowledge codification, what characterises their relationships, and what other factors are involved in an organisational context

Research questions

- Who is involved in processes of knowledge codification in a knowledge management context and what characterises their relationships?
- What knowledge are they codifying and why?
- How is the codification of knowledge occurring?
- What organisational factors are involved in the codification process?

1.5 Thesis structure

The thesis is structured into a further nine chapters.

Chapter 2, *Knowledge management and the codification of knowledge*, sets the knowledge management and KM context of the research, and focuses in on the codification of knowledge as a key concept. Key organisational and management literature on knowledge management and codification is used to focus the research.

Chapter 3, *Knowledge Management in Post Office Consulting*, introduces the organisation in which fieldwork for the research was conducted. The case-study organisation, Post Office Consulting, is set in the context of the Knowledge Management phenomenon. It is shown how interest in the idea that Post Office Consulting is a 'knowledge organisation' has been translated into a formal programme of initiatives for knowledge management.

Chapter 4, *Research methods*, discusses the methodology used to conduct the research. The research is based on participant observation in order to examine processes of knowledge codification as they are occurring.

Chapter 5, *The Argentina Knowledge Capture Project*, introduces the main empirical 'location' of the research. The Argentina Knowledge Capture Project - or AKAP, as it was known by the project participants - was a project emerging from Post Office Consulting's activity in knowledge management. The chapter describes what happened in the project and who are the key participants. It shows how different aspects of the project activity can be seen as processes of knowledge codification occurring at different levels of interaction in the organisation.

Chapters 6 to 9 then go on to present an analysis of knowledge codification occurring at these different levels of social interaction. The four chapters examine processes of knowledge codification occurring at an individual level, a formal group level, an organisational level, and an informal group level. These separate analyses are then synthesised in Chapter 10, *Knowledge management and the codification of knowledge: A synthesis*, which draws out the main findings and highlights the main contributions of the research.

CHAPTER 2: KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT AND THE CODIFICATION OF KNOWLEDGE

2.1 Introduction

The objective of this chapter is to explore some key literature relevant to knowledge management and the codification of knowledge. This discussion is presented by way of focusing the research. The chapter also identifies key concepts from the literature to assist the research process. The chapter starts by examining the arrival of a 'Knowledge Management phenomenon' which is the context in which this research arose. It then goes on to present an overview of the types of management activity which are said to characterise knowledge management. From this emerges two broad approaches to knowledge management, which can be linked to two more fundamental perspectives on knowledge - as object or process. The concepts of 'tacit' and 'explicit' knowledge are then introduced as key elements in the discourse about the manageability of knowledge. It is shown in this discussion, that the concept of knowledge codification is intimately associated with this nexus between the so-called tacit and explicit forms: The 'codifiability' of tacit knowledge appears to be a key concern here. The discussion then considers the wider conceptual link between information and knowledge, and where codification comes into the relationship.

The chapter then turns to the codification of knowledge as a key facet of the notion that knowledge can be managed. The rise of knowledge codification as a focus of management activity can be seen as contingent with the conflation of KM more broadly. In the organisational, management and KM literature, knowledge codification is discussed explicitly as an object of management activity. The overriding focus of these discussions is about how codification plays a part in the transfer of knowledge. It is shown here that knowledge is discussed in the literature as something which can be managed once it is codified. While the importance of processes by which knowledge is codified in organisations is touched upon, no literature has been found which addresses the *process* of knowledge codification in an

organisational context in any depth, or presents any empirical research on the subject. This literature does, however, point to some interesting conceptual aspects of knowledge codification which could contribute to the research. The chapter finally focuses in on two such important conceptual aspects of knowledge codification which help to focus and guide the research. These are Blackler's typology of knowledge in organisations (1995), and the 'communities of practice' literature which suggests an informal dimension to the codification of knowledge in organisations.

The chapter concludes by outlining the aims of this research. These have been identified from the gaps in our understanding of knowledge codification in the organisation, and are informed by the key concepts which have emerged from the literature.

2.2 The Knowledge Management phenomenon

The impetus for this research was stimulated by the flood of activity around Knowledge Management (KM). Interest in KM has escalated rapidly in the fields of management, organisation studies and business practice since the mid-1990s (Swan, 1999; Quintas, 2001). The objective of this section is to set the thesis in the context of this KM phenomenon. It considers the wider socio-economic developments which have conflated the focus on knowledge in organisations. While this knowledge discourse has attracted considerable interest from a broad span of inter-disciplinary academic circles, the academic discourse does not call for the management of knowledge per se. Jones (1998) believes that KM is essentially a practitioner-led phenomenon, stemming from perhaps a 'faddish' perception that knowledge is the latest thing which managers must do. In the following section a more practice-based perspective is given on what organisations are actually doing to manage knowledge. In this section, a more 'macro' perspective is given on how we arrived at KM.

It is not surprising that knowledge has become a focus of management, given the wider discourse on knowledge in organisations which has been fomenting really since ideas of a 'post-industrial' era were given serious consideration by Bell (1974). Machlup's empirical evidence of a decline in the industrial manufacturing sector and growth in 'knowledge production' (1980) heralded the arrival of a new type of organisation (Drucker, 1992). Concepts such as the manufacture of knowledge (Knorr-Cetina, 1981) and production of knowledge (Gibbons et al, 1994) are related to fundamental structural changes in the organisation of labour. Now 'knowledge workers' are no longer producing physical products, but instead creating and reconfiguring knowledge in 'knowledge' and 'knowledge-based industries' (Gibbons et al., 1994). We now have 'knowledge-intensive firms' (Starbuck, 1992) engaged in 'knowledge creation' (Nonaka 1994; Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995; von Krogh et al. 2000). We also have academics propounding knowledge-based theories of the firm (e.g. Grant 1996, 1997; Spender, 1996).

Whether or not the creation and configuration of knowledge is something which has always occurred in organisations is a different debate. The point is that there is an overriding perception of the importance of knowledge in organisations, and this has been enough to provoke attention from a range of academic discourses and attract a cross-disciplinary mix of commentators. Before the conflation of the KM phenomenon, the importance of knowledge in organisations was already receiving considerable attention in the literature on learning in organisations. For example, Schon (1991, p.242) describes organisations as "repositories of cumulatively built up knowledge" and draws attention to managerial learning in an organisational context. Taking their lead from metaphors of organisations as 'brains' (Morgan, 1986), some have been developing the idea that organisations themselves can learn (e.g. Senge, 1990). The concept of the learning organisation has also been linked to questions about whether organisations have knowledge (Tsoukas and Vladimirou 2001).

Other academics have come at knowledge in organisations from a perspective of studying how firms innovate. For example, Leonard Barton (1995) looks at how best an organisation can be structured around internal knowledge processes in order to tap the firm's innovation potential. Also, economists interested in technological change have followed Nelson and Winter's discussions of the embedded nature of knowledge (1982) to look for explanations of 'path-dependency' in firms (e.g. Coombs et al, 1987; Dosi et al, 1988) and how this is related to innovation. Coombs and Hull (1997) recast research and development activities in firms as knowledge management practices in the light of this apparent 'new paradigm of knowledge.'

It should be stressed that this thesis is not about whether organisations have and can develop knowledge, nor about the role of knowledge in innovation. The thesis is about what is being done in organisations to manage knowledge.

The notion that knowledge can and should be managed emerges most obviously among those who advocate a resource-based view of the firm, first attributed to Grant (1991), who has recently begun discussing the centrality of knowledge as a key resource (Grant, 1996; 1997). As an advocate of this view, the populist management 'guru' Peter Drucker is often attributed with the claim that "knowledge is the only meaningful economic resource". According to Spender (1996, p.45), advocates of a resource-based view of the firm treat knowledge as a "transferable, objective commodity" and thus as an object of management. The resource-based view of knowledge is also evident in the discourse around 'intellectual capital' (e.g. Bradley, 1997; Wiig, 1997; Edvinsson and Sullivan, 1996), with managers seeking to measure and control the intellectual value of their organisations. It is this resource-based view of knowledge, which Swan and Scarborough (2001) suggest has dominated the development of 'knowledge management.'

But why KM now? If knowledge has gradually emerged as a more important focus over the last generation, why did KM wait until the mid-1990s to hit the world like wildfire? This question

is addressed in depth by Quintas (2001), who gives a detailed discussion of the specific factors which he believes may have made firms 'wake up' to the need to manage knowledge at that particular time. This section will not repeat Quintas' analysis. However this section will now go on to discuss new developments in Information and Communication Technologies as one of the particularly interesting 'conflation factors.' This is a precursor to the link between codification, information and knowledge made later in the chapter.

Concepts such as the 'post-industrial society' (Bell, 1974) and the 'Information Age' (Castells, 1996) have played a part in precipitating the discourse on the role of knowledge. The information age is a concept which is used to explain the broader social and economic characteristics of the changing nature and use of information technology in an increasingly global 'network' society. Castells draws upon Freeman and Perez's (1988) concept of a new 'techno-economic paradigm' to interpret the structural changes in global economic organisation. Freeman and Perez argue that a new techno-economic paradigm is based on the convergence of information and communication technologies in the mid-1970s (hence a shift to current preference for the term Information and Communications Technologies - or ICTs). This new paradigm is characterised by a departure from the former dominance of energy and material-intensive mass production in the 'industrial age' to a mode of production based on cheap inputs of information.

Castells coins the term 'informationalism' as the new mode of production, where productivity lies in "the technology of knowledge generation, information processing and symbolic communication" (1996, p.17). Whilst recognising that knowledge and the processing of information have always been integral elements in the production process, Castells argues that what is different in this informational mode of development is a "networked, deeply interdependent economy ... that becomes increasingly able to apply its progress in technology, knowledge and management to technology, knowledge and management themselves" (1996, p.67).

In the context of KM, there are two broad links that can be made between the ICT paradigm and the emergence of KM. First ICTs are visible as the superstructure upon which much of the 'new' KM activity is based. Second, and more subtle, is the apparent reconfiguration in the production or generation of knowledge engendered by new forms of work and organisation. In order to illustrate this shift, an important heuristic has been developed by Gibbons et al (1994). In examining the nature of knowledge production in the realm of scientific enquiry, they argue that the traditional, linear method of knowledge production channelled into homogenous academic disciplines - or 'Mode 1' knowledge production - is being superseded in significance by a new form of knowledge production, which they have called 'Mode 2'. Unlike Mode 1 which seeks universally applicable 'truth' - what Gibbons et al call the "Newtonian model of science" - Mode 2 brings together "a wider, more temporary and heterogeneous set of practitioners, collaborating on a problem defined in a specific and localised context" (Gibbons et al, 1994 p.3). In Mode 2 the collaborating parties work across disciplines, distributed locations and often institutional boundaries, coming together to produce transient knowledge which is specific to the 'context of application' (see also Foray and Gibbons, 1996). Mode 2 knowledge production is a distributed process, characterised by flexibility and multi-functionalism, and most importantly, it is predicated on the use of new Information and Communication Technologies, which allow practitioners to work together in new ways and establish new forms of enquiry.

Gibbons et al's thesis on the concept of mode 2 knowledge production suggests not only the changing significance of knowledge production in the organisation, but also the fusion of knowledge created in theory and knowledge created in practice, which essentially characterises the emergence of the KM phenomenon. This is an aspect of what Gibbons et al call the 'massification of research and education' - the expansion of mass higher education with formal learning continuing into the workplace. This is reflected in the KM phenomenon with an ever-more educated, theoretically-minded and research-oriented practitioner base applying the theory

of the growing significance of knowledge in the organisation to the practical question of what to do about knowledge as an object of management.

This section has provided a quick overview of the academic discourses and socio-economic developments which have conflated the arrival of knowledge as a focus of management in the organisation. The discussion has not touched upon what characterises the nature of management activity in the context of KM. This is the subject of the following section. In the meantime, the following quote from Swan and Scarborough (2001a, p.49) provides a good summary of the principle aims of knowledge management;

“the key problems that knowledge management attempts to address are those associated with the distribution of knowledge across increasingly fluid social boundaries ... Firms introducing knowledge management initiatives seek to improve their exploitation (re-use) and exploration (creation) of knowledge by providing ways of interconnecting disparate knowledge domains as they restructure (e.g. flatter, decentralised or networked forms) and re-organise (e.g. around process lines) sometimes on a global scale. Clearly IT has a role to play here.”

The chapter will now go on to look at what types of activities are being practised in organisations in order to bring knowledge management about.

2.3 Knowledge management practice

Part of the difficulty of talking about knowledge management is in defining what constitutes knowledge management practice. As Coombs and Hull (1997) observe, some practices in organisations may be knowledge management without the label. It is an aim of this thesis to research what is actually practised as knowledge management in organisations. However, it must also be assumed that what organisations *say* they are doing about knowledge management

can be taken *de facto* as knowledge management practice. For the purpose of illustrating the broad themes of knowledge management practice, therefore, this section largely draws upon how practitioners were describing their organisations' knowledge management practices in the inaugural edition of the journal *Knowledge Management*, launched in August 1997.

Like most new business initiatives, knowledge management is essentially about improving the performance of the firm. As companies are looking to make more efficient and productive use of existing resources (Quintas et al, 1997), attention is turned on the knowledge and expertise which is brought collectively to the organisation by its people. Underpinning this is the commonly-held conviction that their knowledge will increasingly become *the* basis for competition in the next century. This is the rationale underpinning the work of KM teams in BP (Collison, 1997) and Arthur Andersen (Finerty, 1997), for example.

While Collison (1997) talks about the need to make better use of the expertise which is already resident in BP, gaining more efficient use of that expertise inevitably leads to a focus on the way the members of the organisation communicate with each other. Thus ICL's KM initiative (named 'Valuing ICL Knowledge') is driven by the needs to reduce duplication of effort (both in new service development and in different parts of the business bidding for the same work) and to have a better system for identifying company experts for involvement with projects (Lank, 1997). The success of the ICL initiative is viewed in terms of the productivity gains from saved time.

Getting the whole organisation to work better across its constituent parts is a key driver for NatWest Markets' development of the 'Green Book' (Ward, 1997), a kind of corporate yellow pages which points to areas of knowledge and expertise which are not apparent merely from job titles. Similarly, Arthur Andersen's AA Online is an example of new ways of linking expertise across the organisation (Finerty, 1997). These are examples of what Davenport and Prusak

(1998) call 'knowledge maps', which engender a different way of looking at the organisation beyond the formal organisational chart.

Most of these practitioners stress that it is not just a case of pointing to where the expertise is, but there also needs to be a qualitative change in the way this expertise interacts. NatWest Markets and ICL therefore have a clear objective to encourage a greater sharing of knowledge across the organisation. There is also the sense that this involves a more holistic approach to the business, that knowledge sharing is a need which transcends the firm's functional boundaries. Lank (1997) stresses that ICL's KM project is not owned by any one of the business' functions and that project members have cross-functional skills drawn from all parts of the organisation. The importance of multi-functional teams drawn from diverse backgrounds and experiences, according to Leonard (1997), is that they are more likely to be productive in their generation of new knowledge. All of these points indicate an approach to knowledge, however it is conceived, as something which needs to flow - or be 'shared' - across organisations if the maximum potential is to accrue to the company.

As IT has brought new communications opportunities to organisations, the IT network is often seen as the ideal medium for this new-improved knowledge 'sharing'. Therefore many of the KM projects described are built around an Intranet platform which provides workers with a new common meeting space to ask each other questions and share ideas, where similar channels of communication were not open before. For example, ICL's employees are invited to meet at the company's intranet Café, Arthur Andersen has its online KnowledgeSpace, and BP's 'virtual teams' are able to work remotely together. There is, however, a clear warning against the expectation that the new technology can itself effect the kind of culture change needed if more knowledge is to be 'shared.' Finerty (1997) for example, recognises that Arthur Andersen's knowledge systems are limited on their own, but that the future of their KM project needs to focus more on "cultural elements". Prusak (1997) warns of an overemphasis on IT which he sees more as the infrastructure for connecting people who create the knowledge, than a means to

capture it. Similarly Leonard (1997), while recognising that IT can be used to create “powerful knowledge repositories”, believes that integrating knowledge across the organisation is as much about managing “people networks” as “software networks”.

There is also an ‘intellectual capital’ theme underpinning some of this knowledge management activity. The widening gap between the market valuations of some companies and the few physical assets evident in their balance sheets have turned the attention towards the firm’s ‘knowledge assets’ and ‘intellectual capital’ as likely locations of this intangible value (Quintas, 2001). For example, the Swedish financial services company Skandia is widely seen as a pioneer in developing a reporting framework which takes a better account of its intangible value (Edvinsson and Sullivan, 1996). Also, tools such as the Balanced Score Card (Kaplan and Norton, 1996) give a better benchmark of a firm’s intangible resources and its adaptability to changing market conditions.

Many of the knowledge management practices discussed have been developed in a project environment, and thus tend towards delivering a tangible product. They are, after all, new tools for people to use. Company yellow pages and knowledge maps point to the location of knowledge, intranets provide people with new ways of getting their knowledge together, and new accounting methods give knowledge an organisational value. The belief implicit in the KM phenomenon that knowledge can be managed, coupled with the need to deliver on these claims in a business environment, may inevitably lead practitioners to focus on more manageable aspects of knowledge. For example Lank (1997) shows that the need for her KM project team to demonstrate an ‘early win’ led them to create a global information service on ICL’s intranet, even though this was not the primary focus of the intranet project. This led them in turn to focus on the information which was needed within the system, rather than using the intranet to promote new ways of working with people and information.

However, the focus on information may be more fundamental than this. It may be to do with a treatment of knowledge as something that needs to be 'objectified' in order to manage. There are times when knowledge is discussed in terms of the people and how they share their knowledge together, for example, in the case of intranet 'meeting spaces.' Other times knowledge is discussed in terms of what people know, and how to capture their knowledge and move it around the organisation independently of them. Terms such as 'knowledge transfer' often contain the assumption that the knowledge needs to be objectified in order to be moved around (e.g. O'Dell and Grayson, 1998). Creating information about what people know is one way of objectifying their knowledge, and thus gives something tangible to manage. On the other hand, it would be very difficult to manage what people know.

2.4 Two views of knowledge

It would therefore appear that there are broadly two focuses of knowledge management - the relationships between people, and the relationships between people and information. According to Hansen et al (1999), these approaches become manifest in two broad strategies for knowledge management: 'Codification', where the emphasis is on the relationship between people and documents - the advice for a company following a codification strategy is to "develop an electronic document system that codifies, stores, disseminates and allows re-use of knowledge." The alternative strategy is 'personalization', where the emphasis is on the relationship between people - the advice here is to "develop networks for linking people so that tacit knowledge can be shared."

This distinction between approaches to knowledge management is interpreted by Roos and Von Krogh (1996), Sveiby (1996), Quintas et al (1997), Alvesson and Kärreman (2001) and Swan and Scarborough (2001) as coalescing around two perspectives on knowledge. One perspective treats knowledge as a reifiable object, capable of being packaged up, owned and passed around,

characterised as the ‘cognitive’ (Swan et al., 1999) or ‘cognitivist’ (von Krogh, 1998) perspective. Another perspective treats knowledge - or more significantly ‘knowing’ (Blackler, 1995) - as a human process which occurs between people in social networks, characterised by Swan et al. (1999) as the ‘community’ perspective. A similar distinction is made by Cook and Brown (1999) - although not in the context of knowledge management - between an ‘epistemology of possession’ where “what is known is typically treated as something people possess,” and an ‘epistemology of practice’ which takes ‘knowing’ as its focus.

The so-called ‘epistemology of possession’ or ‘cognitive perspective’ on knowledge is also redolent of what Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995), Cohen (1998), and Cook and Brown (1999) call a ‘Cartesian view’ of knowledge, which seeks to separate knower from known. Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) in particular claim that there is an epistemological predisposition in the West towards achieving a ‘Cartesian split,’ unlike Eastern cultures which do not place pre-eminence on such ‘explicit’ knowledge. Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) therefore argue that the treatment of knowledge as something objectifiable dominates the approach of managers in Western companies. It is the distinction drawn by Nonaka (1994) and Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) between tacit and explicit forms of knowledge to which the discussion now turns.

2.5 ‘Tacit’ and ‘explicit’ knowledge

The terms ‘tacit’ and ‘explicit’ knowledge, first juxtaposed by Nonaka (1994) and Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) in the context of knowledge in organisations, have become a popular way of talking about knowledge in a KM context. Among the practitioners reviewed in section 2.2, a distinction between tacit and explicit knowledge is made by Collison (1997), Ward (1997), and Leonard (1997). Tacit knowledge appears to be discussed broadly as personal knowledge, whereas explicit knowledge is seen as able to be separated from the individual. It is important to

raise this distinction between tacit and explicit knowledge, as this section shows how the concept of knowledge codification can be seen as the nexus between the two types.

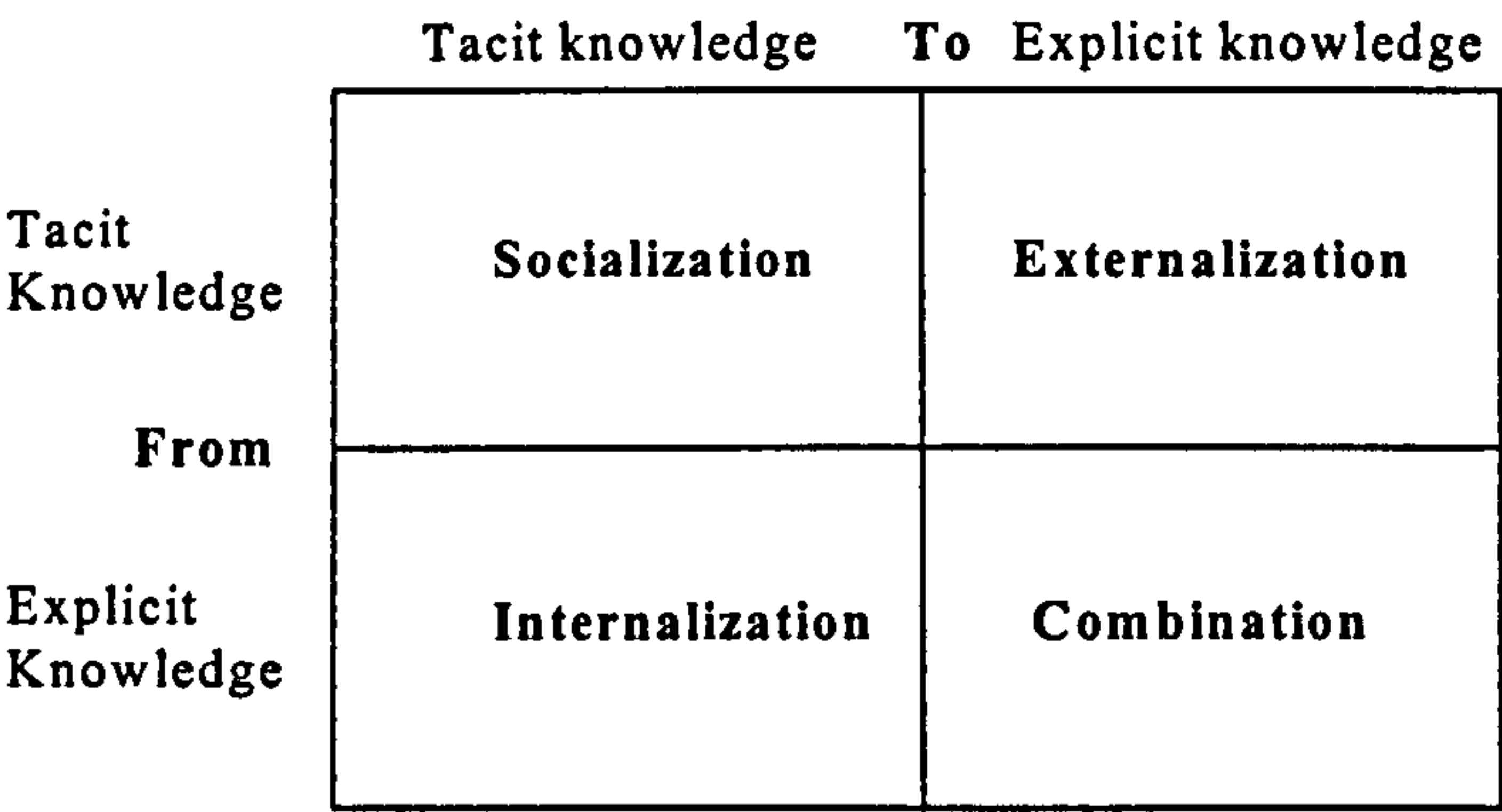
First a brief overview of Nonaka and Takeuchi's (1995) influential 'theory of organizational knowledge creation' is given as background. This is based around the idea that knowledge creation in organisations is a continuous and dynamic process of interaction between tacit and explicit knowledge:

"our theory of knowledge creation is anchored to the very important assumption that human knowledge is created and expanded through the social interaction between tacit knowledge and explicit knowledge. The quintessential knowledge creation process takes place when tacit knowledge is converted into explicit knowledge. In other words, our hunches, perceptions, mental models, beliefs, and experiences are converted to something that can be communicated and transmitted in formal and systematic language." (Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995 p.230-231)

Their theory is characterised by four processes which move in a continuous spiral, where the organisation is the context which 'amplifies' the process, thus creating 'organizational knowledge'. The organisation provides the social context, or sense of shared goals, in which the knowledge processes take place. Nonaka and Takeuchi's theory is important because of their application of these processes in an organisational context. These four processes of 'tacit to tacit,' 'tacit to explicit,' 'explicit to explicit' and 'explicit to tacit' are presented in 2x2 matrix shown in Figure 2.1.

Nonaka and Takeuchi critique tacit-to-tacit as "it cannot be leveraged by the organization as a whole" and explicit-to-explicit which they say does not "extend the organization's existing knowledge base" (1995, p.70). These processes become significant, they argue, as triggers in the interplay between tacit and explicit forms of knowledge, which is how the important new knowledge is created.

Figure 2.1 Nonaka and Takeuchi’s ‘four modes of knowledge conversion’



Four modes of knowledge conversion
Source: Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995 p.62

Nonaka and Takeuchi were of course not the first to discuss ‘tacit’ knowledge, but it appears they were the first to juxtapose ‘tacit’ with ‘explicit.’ The term ‘tacit knowledge’ is often attributed to the philosopher Michael Polanyi, albeit erroneously (for example, Lam 1997; Davenport and Prusak, 1998). While it is the case that Polanyi first used the term ‘tacit’ in relation to human knowledge, a careful examination of both of his relevant works in this field (Polanyi, 1958;1967) shows that he never used the term ‘tacit knowledge’ *per se*. While Polanyi was interested in how we know things tacitly - or ‘tacit knowing’ - he was neither interested in what tacit knowing is knowledge of, nor in the need to explicate this tacit dimension. Indeed, Polanyi warned that “the process of formalizing all knowledge to the exclusion of any tacit knowing is self-defeating” (1967, p.20). Polanyi certainly did not advocate the “importance and value of recognizing and trying to capture tacit knowledge” as claimed by O’Dell and Grayson (1998, p.157). It is also not the case that Polanyi “first articulated the concept of tacit versus explicit knowledge” (Davenport and Prusak, 1998 p.71).

It is suggested that Nonaka and Takeuchi are responsible for popularising the notion that tacit knowledge can be made explicit. Statements such as “there are two kinds of knowledge: explicit

knowledge and tacit knowledge” (Nonaka and Konno, 1998) have been interpreted by some that knowledge is either tacit or explicit, as shown in the following extract from the UK Government’s 1998 Competitiveness White Paper, *Building the knowledge driven economy*¹:

“To understand the role of knowledge and information in the wider economy, it is important to distinguish two types of knowledge: ‘codified’ and ‘tacit’. Knowledge is codifiable if it can be written down and easily transferred to others. Tacit knowledge is often slow to acquire and much more difficult to transfer ... This difference in transferability means that codified and tacit knowledge need to be managed and rewarded quite differently.”

This treatment distorts Polanyi, whose main thesis was that all knowing has a tacit dimension. According to Moss (1995, p.12) in a discussion of Polanyi’s philosophy, “[knowing] always involves the tacit integration of particulars, subsidiarily known, to a focus of meaning which is itself an object of tacit knowing. The idea of strictly explicit knowledge is self-contradictory.” Similarly, Wenger (1998, p.9-10) encourages us to move beyond the assumption that “knowledge consists of pieces of information explicitly stored in the brain” towards an understanding that “information stored in explicit ways is only a small part of knowing.” Others question whether tacit knowledge can become explicit at all (e.g. Cook and Brown, 1999; Tsoukas, 2001). Also covering similar ground but using the terminology of codification, Saviotti reminds us that “knowledge is not created codified ... Knowledge is always at least partly tacit in the minds of those who create it” (1998, p848). Similarly Cowan and Foray (1997, p.600) point out, “there will always be some tacit knowledge involved in performing an action. This is why codification cannot be considered as a simple transfer of knowledge from the tacit to the codified domain ...”

¹ Our competitive future: Building the knowledge driven economy, Dec. 1998. Downloaded from http://www2.dti.gov.uk/comp/competitive/an_repr This quote does of course not contain the term ‘explicit’ knowledge, but it is shown later that ‘explicit’ and ‘codified’ are often equated.

This thesis is not about whether or not tacit knowledge can become explicit, or codified, as some of these latter quotes prefer. The discussion around Nonaka and Takeuchi's framework is used to draw attention to a dynamic process of interaction between 'internal' and 'external' forms of human knowledge. Their focus is on the discussion of an individual - group - organisational dynamic as levels of interaction which create knowledge for the organisation. However, the processes by which this knowledge comes 'out' of people is not addressed in their theory.

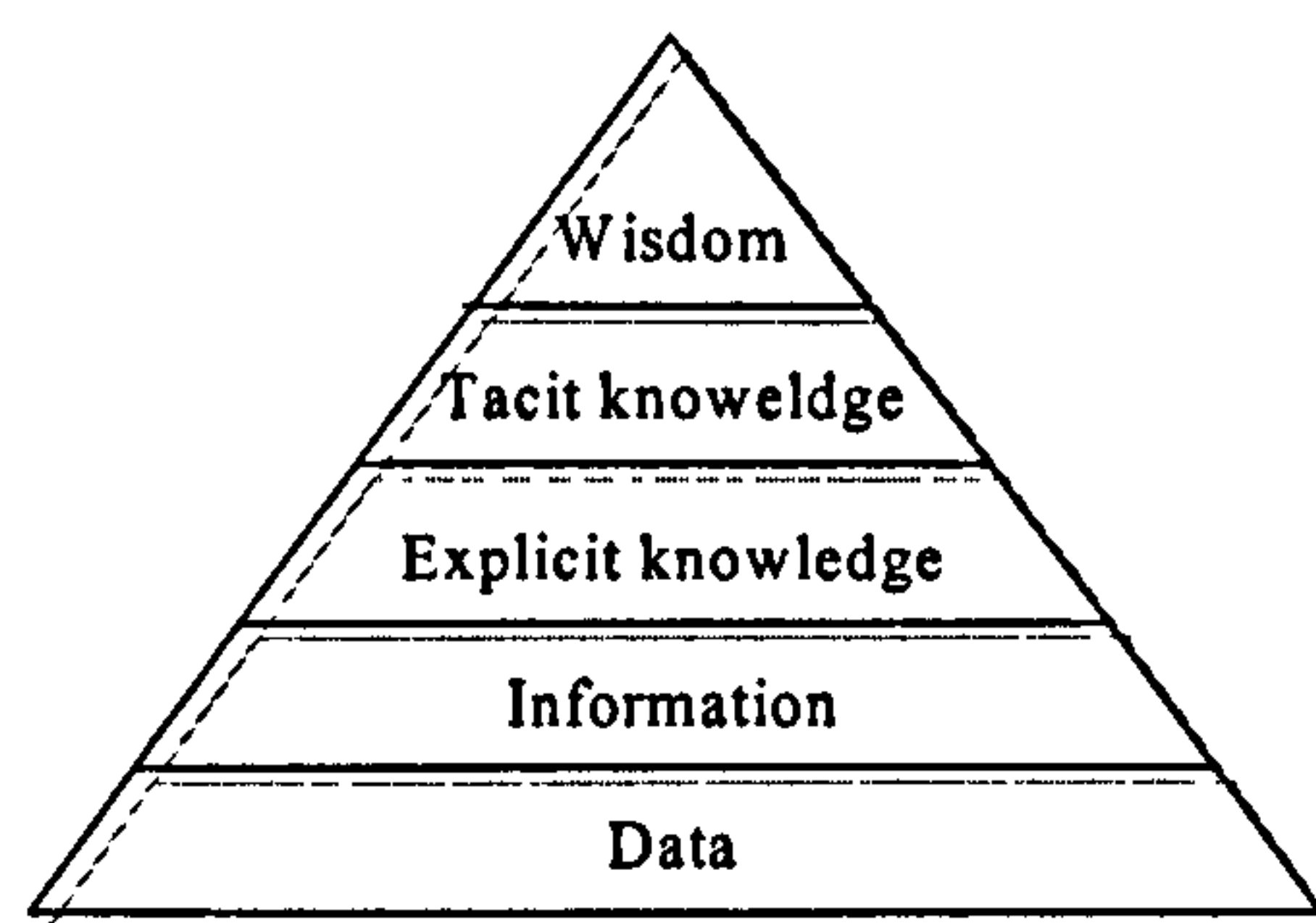
There is good reason to suppose that codification may be one of the ways in which people can render their knowledge 'explicit.' The very fact that Cowan and Foray (1997), Saviotti (1998), Roberts (2000), Dutrenit (2000), and the government White Paper all juxtapose the terms 'tacit' and 'codified' would suggest that they view codified knowledge as the 'other' dimension of knowledge to tacit. Although Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) do not discuss codification or even codes, nevertheless their index entry for 'codified knowledge' says 'see explicit knowledge.' Baumard (1999) also uses the terms 'explicit' and 'codified' interchangeably. Swan's (1999) claim that "the attempt to codify knowledge and abstract it from people ignores the fact that some tacit knowledge is probably impossible to codify" would also support a view that codification is one way that knowledge can 'come out' of people.

2.6 Information, knowledge and codification

The distinction between tacit and explicit knowledge also appears in some characterisations of the relationship between information and knowledge in a KM context. This is clear in Rajan et al's 'hierarchy of knowledge' shown in Figure 2.2, where wisdom and tacit knowledge are treated as fundamentally personal, while explicit knowledge, information and data are seen as separated from the individual knower. This type of characterisation of a relationship between knowledge, information and data is also made by Davis & Botkin (1994) and Zack (1999) in the

discussion of knowledge management, where data is treated as a lower-order concept and knowledge is valued more highly in the pyramid. Finerty (1997) also uses a hierarchical analogy, where he sees data as disorganised bits which have no meaning on their own, information as organised data, and knowledge as “information that has value”. Leonard and Sensiper similarly see knowledge as “information that is relevant, actionable, and based at least partially on experience. Knowledge is a sub-set of information ... (1998, p.113).

Figure 2.2 Rajan et al’s ‘hierarchy of knowledge’



Source: Rajan et al, 1999 p.2

This thesis rejects such a hierarchical treatment of information and knowledge. Furthermore, there is no objective need to include data in the definition. While information and knowledge are clearly associated, data is something completely different: While knowledge to one person is information to another, data can be created from both knowledge and information. According to Machlup (1980, p.56) “linguistically, the difference between knowledge and information lies chiefly in the verb form: To inform is an activity by which knowledge is conveyed; to know may be the result of having been informed.”

It is argued here that the inclusion of data in the definition is linked to a view that the current interest in knowledge management stems from an evolution in the capability of Information and Communication Technologies. Davis and Botkin illustrate this view in their claim that the

knowledge-based business represents a “shift in the economy from data to information to knowledge” (1994, p.166). The characterisation of a shift “from data to information to knowledge” is also used by Tiwana (2000) in his recommendation of how to build an IT-based knowledge management system.

It was shown in the section on the ‘KM phenomenon’ that developments in Information Technology (IT) have brought new communications opportunities within and between organisations. Indeed, the convergence of new technologies in information processing and communications has precipitated a shift to use of the term ‘Information and Communications Technologies’ - or ICTs - as a more adequate representation of the complementarity and functionality of these new technologies. The term ICTs therefore represents an evolution from a view of IT dominated by the generation and processing of data and its storage in ‘databases’, to a more communications-based view, whereby the computer becomes an interface between individual and organisation and acts as a window on a wider world of information (Quintas et al, 1997). According to Quintas et al, the concept of knowledge repositories is a hangover from the database view of ICTs, which is what dominates many current conceptualisations of KM. In reviewing a collection of case-studies in Knowledge Management, Swan (1999, p.6) claims that “the emphasis in the majority of examples of KM is on using computers to extract and codify experts’ knowledge into explicit forms which can then be shared more widely.”

Within these cases there would therefore appear to be a fundamental treatment of knowledge as information which can be passed around in ICTs, and codification clearly plays a part in the process of putting knowledge in the form of information. Steinmueller (2000) draws the explicit link between codification of knowledge and the ‘economics of technology’ where his principle interest is in the conversion of knowledge into information and its transferability via Information and Communication Technologies.

The issue of whether it is knowledge or information which is being transferred by computers leads some to consider the limits to the transferability of knowledge by computers (e.g. Sveiby, 1996; Roberts, 2000). Sveiby (1996) argues that much of information systems development has been shaped by 'information theory' (Shannon and Weaver, 1949). Shannon and Weaver propounded a simple model of information exchange which focuses on the technical functionality of the channel by which information flows between a sender and a receiver. However, they did not address the nature of the information flowing, and how meanings are attributed by the participants to the messages transferred. Thus Sveiby (1996) critiques our understanding of the transferability of knowledge via information systems, which tend to focus on the flow of information from the sender, and not on the sense made of the information by the receiver. On critiquing the limitation of information theories, Baumard also maintains that;

“Information is but a medium to initiate and formalize knowledge. Most theories of information direct all their attention to the manner in which it is transported, distributed or exchanged, while it remains necessary to develop a theory that looks more closely at the *sense* of the information and the *messages* that convey information in organizations.” (Baumard, 1999, p.20).

Chandler also provides a clear critique of Shannon and Weaver from a communication theory perspective at his website, Semiotics for Beginners.² Information theory cannot assume communication, as it only focuses on the message which is transmitted from the sender.

It has been suggested here that the codification of knowledge is at the nexus between knowledge and information. Codifying knowledge is essentially the creation of information, or we could say that codified knowledge is also information. We can say it is knowledge from the perspective of the person who codified it, and information to someone else. However, by simply

² Daniel Chandler is a lecturer in Media Theory at University of Wales, Aberystwyth, and author of the renowned website Semiotics for Beginners, which has recently been published in print (Chandler, 2002). The website is available at <http://www.aber.ac.uk/media/Documents/S4B/> where his critique of the Transmission Model of Communication (focusing on Shannon and Weaver) can be accessed.

codifying knowledge we cannot necessarily say it has been transferred, as codification is only part of a process of communicating knowledge, the part which occurs with the codifier.

2.7 The rise of knowledge codification

The discussion so far has focused on the phenomenon and practice of knowledge management, and how notions of codification feature in knowledge management approaches. The remaining chapter will now focus in on the codification of knowledge more specifically and how the concept is treated in the literature. It is necessary to restate that this is a thesis about the codification of knowledge in an organisational and knowledge management context. Chapter 1 suggested that there are wider behavioural, social, and cultural and dimensions to codification, not all of which may be about knowledge *per se*, and not all of which can be addressed in one thesis. In particular it was emphasised in Chapter 1 that this thesis is about knowledge management in organisations, not about semiotics or communication theory.

It is suggested in this section that a rise in interest in knowledge codification is related to the conflation of the KM phenomenon. First it is worth noting that a literature search using the BIDS service found that use of the term codification before the mid 1980s was almost exclusively limited to the codification of law and medical practice. After that time the term was increasingly applied in the context of artificial intelligence, knowledge elicitation and knowledge engineering. These emerging research bases are essentially concerned with the translation of human intelligence into artificial computer language, and the elicitation of human knowledge into knowledge-based systems, both of which areas have a clear affinity with being talked about in terms of code and of codification. It was not until the 1990s that codification began to be applied to the context of knowledge in organisations, and presumably this shift has been related to the explosion of interest in knowledge management during this period.

The role of information and communication technologies as a dominant techno-economic and organisational paradigm has brought the focus of communication onto the asynchronous transmission of text-based information across geographically dispersed 'network' organisations. Some argue that this has resulted in more knowledge codification. For example, Cowan and Foray (1997) maintain that the overall level of codification is growing with the increasing use of ICTs. Boisot, Griffiths and Moles (1997) also claim that "the need to communicate clearly and quickly to large audiences across space and time creates a pressure to codify what otherwise remain tacit knowledge."

The discourse on 'tacit' and 'explicit' knowledge has provided a common entry point into the discussion of codification, where some commentators (e.g. Baumard, 1999) use the terms explicit and codified interchangeably, and codification is seen as a way of making knowledge explicit. While Michael Polanyi's tacit dimension to 'knowing' provides a common entry into this discourse, his thesis also provides a common point for departure (Fleck, 1997), with many commentators drawing upon Nonaka and Takeuchi's observation of the interplay between tacit and explicit knowledge.

The discourse between 'tacit' and 'explicit' knowledge - popularised by Nonaka and Takeuchi in their theory of organisational knowledge creation (1995) - may have contributed to managers emphasising the need to make tacit knowledge explicit. This objective features in the knowledge management practices discussed by both Ward (1997) and Collison (1997). Nonaka and Takeuchi's argument that Western managers privilege explicit knowledge more highly than tacit knowledge may thus be a self-fulfilling prophesy. Whether the UK managers would have sought to make tacit knowledge explicit anyway, or whether they did this because they read Nonaka and Takeuchi is a different debate. Nevertheless, it is clear that codification is a way in which knowledge can be made explicit. Blackler (1995, pp.1022-3) refers to the "mystique often associated with abstract, codified knowledge", claiming that in Western cultures this type of knowledge enjoys a "privileged status."

Rhetorical claims to the manageability of knowledge has inevitably led practitioners to focus on the manageable aspects of it. The treatment of knowledge as a reified, disembodied object makes it tangible and manageable, whereas the management of knowing as a dynamic process of human interaction is more difficult to conceptualise and reify. Thus practice-based tools and techniques for KM focus on codifiable and codified knowledge, leading Baumard (1999, p.21) to conclude that “rather than managing knowledge, organizations manage its codifications.”

2.8 Knowledge codification in organisations

The discussion of knowledge codification so far has been at a broader conceptual level. This has raised the codification of knowledge as an important topic of focus. The discussion now turns to examine literature which addresses explicitly the codification of knowledge in organisations, some of which is more specifically about knowledge management.

The codification of knowledge has attracted particular scrutiny from economists who are interested in the transaction costs of information exchange, and see codification as a means of knowledge transfer (e.g. Cowan and Foray, 1997; Ancori et al, 2000; Cowan et al, 2000). They draw upon Nelson and Winter’s discussion of tacit and embedded knowledge in organisations (1982), and address the codifiability of tacit knowledge. Cowan and Foray (1997) offer an overview of the micro and macro economic implications of codification, observing that knowledge is codified in order to reduce the costs of its acquisition and exchange. Thus “knowledge becomes transferable independently of the transfer of other things, such as people, in which the knowledge is embedded. This facilitates market transactions in knowledge that are difficult to enact when knowledge is tacit.” (p.597) In this sense, they argue, knowledge is becoming more like a commodity.

Cowan and Foray's definition of knowledge codification as "the process of conversion of knowledge into messages which can then be processed as information" (1997, p.596) is useful. However, because of their economics perspective they do not go into the social processes of codification, and certainly do not discuss the organisational context in which these processes are meant to occur. Shifting the focus onto the information created through knowledge codification, Cohendet and Steinmueller (2000) remove the need to talk about the processes by which the information is created.

The focus on codification and the transferability of knowledge is shared by other economists, most notably Teece (1986) and Saviotti (1998) in addressing the question of appropriability, that is, the degree to which firms are able to derive profit or capture value from knowledge. Teece (1986) argues that appropriability is affected by the degree to which knowledge is tacit or codified. Patents, as a legal mechanism for protection, are a form of codification which impact upon the regime of appropriability. The appropriability of technology (i.e. the extent to which economic profit from a piece of technology can be captured and protected) depends upon the degree to which knowledge embedded in the technology is tacit or codified; the argument is that because codified knowledge is easy to transmit, it is also easy for a third party to appropriate, whereas tacit knowledge is more difficult to articulate and therefore imitate.

Zander and Kogut (1995) are interested in the concept of knowledge transfer and the role of codification to effect it. They define firms as "social communities which use their relational structure and shared coding schemes to enhance transfer and communication of new skills and capabilities." (p.76) "An organization is, obviously, more than a collection of disjointed manufacturing sites and functional groups. There is ... an organizing knowledge that provides a unity to the firm" (p.87). Their empirical tests "confirm that the degree to which capabilities are codifiable and teachable influences their speed of transfer" (p.77).

The issue of codification and wider temporal diffusion of knowledge in social systems is addressed at length by Boisot (1983; 1995a; 1995b) and Boisot and Child (1996).

In the specific KM literature, codification is seen as a key facet of the manageability of knowledge in organisations. This is illustrated by Ruggles (1997) who treats the three main knowledge activities covered by knowledge management as “generation, codification and transfer.” Thus codification is seen by many as a prerequisite for the transferability of knowledge. For Ruggles, “knowledge codification is the capture and representation of knowledge so that it can be re-used either by an individual or an organization” (1997, p.2) and “one of the most hotly contested areas of knowledge management involves codification i.e. putting knowledge in various forms that can be leveraged and transferred” (1997, p.6). The way he uses the terms re-use, leverage and transfer suggest a treatment of knowledge as something objectifiable.

There are other advocates of codification as a way of mobilising the transfer of knowledge in organisations (e.g. Davenport & Prusak, 1998; Zander and Kogut, 1995). Conversely, those who discuss knowledge transfer without addressing the issue of codification (e.g. O’Dell and Grayson, 1998) would appear to be neglecting a fundamental aspect to the process.

Zack (1999) claims that “appropriately explicating tacit knowledge so it can be efficiently and meaningfully shared and reapplied, especially outside the originating community, is one of the least understood aspects of knowledge management.” However, by focusing on tools and infrastructure for the management of codified knowledge - as the product of codification - Zack completely ignores the process of codifying the knowledge. His argument is essentially that organisations need to harness codified knowledge through a process of management intervention.

The most detailed treatment of codification in the KM literature is given by Davenport and Prusak (1998) who are two prominent practitioners in the Knowledge Management and Information Management field. They devote an entire chapter to the subject of knowledge codification, starting with the following definition:

“The aim of codification is to put organizational knowledge into a form that makes it accessible to those who need it. It literally turns knowledge into a code (although not necessarily a computer code) to make it organized, explicit, portable, and as easy to understand as possible.” (Davenport and Prusak, 1998 p.68).

There is a clear assumption underpinning their approach to knowledge codification, which is that knowledge needs to be codified in order to effect its movement and usefulness within the organisation. It is also clear from the way they discuss codification that it is a process which requires intervention in order to broker the movement. This is evident from their recommendation of four principles which organisations should observe when codifying knowledge:

1. Managers must decide what business goals the codified knowledge will serve
2. Managers must be able to identify knowledge existing in various forms appropriate to reaching those goals
3. Knowledge managers must evaluate knowledge for usefulness and appropriateness for codification
4. Codifiers must identify an appropriate medium for codification and distribution

Davenport and Prusak (1998, p.69)

Their principle advocacy of knowledge codification in the organisation is the generation of a ‘knowledge map.’ A knowledge map “points to knowledge but doesn’t contain it. It is a guide not a repository ... The principle purpose and clearest benefit of a knowledge map is to show people in the organization where to go when they need expertise” (p.72). This is a necessary

extension of an organization chart, which is a notoriously poor guide to where the knowledge you need might reside - “a good knowledge map goes beyond conventional departmental boundaries” (p.73).

Davenport and Prusak’s coverage of codification is a prescriptive discussion of issues organisations need to be aware of in this context. For example they discuss the benefits and pitfalls of codification, and the technological and political dimensions to mapping knowledge, but they present no empirical discussion of what experiences organisations have encountered through engaging in the codification process. From a closer inspection it appears that Davenport and Prusak have a narrow definition of knowledge codification as classifying and indexing existing information sources. However, they do not address the processes by which the information is created, which this thesis also takes as a process of codification. The treatment of codification as ‘classification’ is also made by Sorensen and Lundh-Snis (2001) although not in the context of KM. Although classification is clearly an aspect of codification, it is maintained in this thesis that the codification of knowledge is a more fundamental part of how knowledge comes ‘out’ of people.

Finally, Sanchez’s (1997) definition for knowledge codification in the organisation is interesting:

“Knowledge codification within organizations. To transfer the knowledge of individuals and groups within an organization, the knowledge sets shared by individuals in a specific context within the organization must be made comprehensible and available to other individuals in other contexts in the organization. Knowledge codification is a term used here to refer to several knowledge management processes within organizations, beginning with processes that seek to identify the subject matter of the knowledge of individuals and the knowledge sets of groups in terms which other individuals and groups within the organization can comprehend.” Sanchez (1997, p.172)

While he clearly has an interventionist view of knowledge codification as an object of management, Sanchez's definition stands out because it begins to open up the social dimensions to knowledge codification, particularly in terms of common understandings achievable among individuals, groups and organisations.

2.9 Blackler's typology of knowledge in organisations

This section reviews a typology of the location of knowledge in organisations made by Blackler (1995). This typology is particularly useful in understanding the relationship between the concepts of knowledge capture and codification.

Blackler (1995), drawing upon earlier work by Collins (1993), has developed a useful typology which examines the different representations of knowledge in organisation studies literature and thus where knowledge is said to be located. It is important to stress that Blackler does not propose this framework in the context of knowledge capture, nor does he use the term. However, Blackler's framework points to the locations of knowledge in the organisation, and therefore by inference, where knowledge can be considered captured in its more passive sense.

Blackler maintains that knowledge can be:

- **embrained** - located in the brains of individuals and "dependent on conceptual skills and cognitive abilities."
- **embodied** - that is, "action-oriented" know-how. It has also been described as "knowledge of acquaintance" and, according to Blackler, is determined by "people's physical presence, on sentient and sensory information, physical cues and face-to-face discussions, is acquired by doing and is rooted in specific contexts."
- **encultured** - this "refers to the process of achieving shared understandings." It is "likely to be heavily dependent on language," thus Blackler treats encultured knowledge as located in

dialogue. Collins (1993) describes encultured knowledge as “socially embedded,” and does not imply that encultured knowledge needs to be verbalised in dialogue.

→ embedded - is “knowledge which resides in systematic routines.”

→ encoded - is “information conveyed by signs and symbols,” what Collins (1993) terms “symbol type.”

It is interesting to observe that Blackler’s framework has an implicit view - although not explicitly explained in these terms - of different ‘levels’ at which the location of knowledge is present. Embodied and embrained knowledge, by their very nature, cannot be seen as located outside the body or brain. Encultured knowledge is the expression of a social attribute shared by multiple members of a culture. Culture is manifest in the way people act within that culture and the values they espouse, and in Blackler’s interpretation, the conversations they have.

Embedded knowledge can occur at an organisational level, residing as it does in routines, whereas encoded knowledge is ubiquitous, it occurs at a range of levels of interaction, and is intimately associated with, and is a manifestation of, the other knowledge types:

“The close relationship between encoded knowledge and the other images of knowledge highlighted in this discussion illustrate the point that it is a mistake to assume that embodied, embedded, embrained, encultured and encoded knowledge can sensibly be conceived as separate from one another. Knowledge is multi-faceted and complex, being both situated and abstract, implicit and explicit, distributed and individual, physical and mental, developing and static, verbal and encoded.” (Blackler, 1995 p1032-33).

Encoded knowledge is singled out by Blackler as deserving particular discussion, and like Collins, he is interested principally in the relationship between encoded knowledge and the other forms. Both argue that the growing predominance of codified knowledge is related to computer use. As Blackler (1995, p.1032) maintains, “the uneasy relationship that encoded knowledge may have to other forms of knowledge has been documented before ... Yet the

extent of the disruption to knowledge bases associated with electronically coded information is new.”

Blackler’s typology, therefore, is a helpful heuristic in illustrating a relationship between the capture of knowledge and codification - or encoded knowledge in Blackler’s terms. This is important, given the synonymous treatment between capturing and codifying which is often made. Blackler’s typology would suggest that not all knowledge capture involves codification, and not all knowledge codification involves capture.

Blackler’s typology also suggests the transfer of knowledge does not necessarily involve its codification. Codification may only be a part of how knowledge is transferred when the other types of knowledge are concerned. Hedlund’s (1994) preference under certain conditions to talk about ‘knowledge transformation’ may be a more appropriate term to use in the context of some of Blackler’s knowledge types.

While this is a particularly useful framework for understanding where knowledge may be located or ‘captured’ (in a passive sense) in organisations, Blackler did not seek to go into the process aspects of this typology of knowledge. In discussing the nature of ‘encoded’ knowledge, the framework is not able to address what is involved in *encoding* - or in the words of this thesis, *codifying* - knowledge in organisations. This thesis therefore engages in this issue of the codification of knowledge as a *process*.

2.10 Communities of practice

Finally this chapter gives a brief overview of literature on ‘communities of practice’ and suggests that this concept is relevant to the codification of knowledge in organisations.

The concept of 'communities of practice' stems from research into 'situated learning' in the organisation (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Brown, Collins & Duguid, 1989). Whereas in the past, research in learning was dominated by a cognitive and mental view of learning processes, more recently sociologists and psychologists have turned their attention to the social and cultural conditions in which learning occurs, of which the organisational context is a significant realm. The thesis on situated learning argues that important learning in the workplace takes place in practice, and relies less upon the receipt of abstracted and decontextualised knowledge. The community of practice, it is argued, is the actual context in which *practice-based* learning occurs, engendering the conditions of shared practice, meaning and identity which denote membership of the community.

Brown and Duguid (1991) use the concept of communities of practice to support their observation that the work people actually do is different from the 'canonical practices' enshrined in company manuals and job descriptions. The 'communities of practice' within which they perform their work are often not the same as the people with whom they are formally linked in the organisational structure. The community of practice can also transcend the organisation. The concept of communities is therefore also used to describe the informal organisation, distinct from task-oriented formal work groups and project teams (Wenger and Snyder, 2000). As Wenger and Snyder (2000, p.141) suggest, communities of practice are an "ideal forum for sharing and spreading best practices across a company."

The concept of 'communities of practice' (Brown, Collins & Duguid, 1989; Brown & Duguid, 1991, 1998; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998, 2000; Wenger & Snyder, 2000) is a useful framework for interpreting the social spheres in which knowledge circulates and is therefore particularly apposite to the question of codification. The discussion in Chapter 1 of the concept of codes suggested that they are inherently about defining identity within communities existing at a range of levels of social interaction. While the 'communities of practice' concept was developed to provide a new perspective on forms of social interaction and the locus of learning

within the *organisation*, the term 'communities' has long been applied to groups of academics or practitioners sharing similar interests or pursuits - for example, the medical community or legal community. What links them essentially is a common knowledge base. As Wenger (1998, p.86) says, "communities of practice can be thought of as shared histories of learning."

Wenger claims that "if knowing is an act of belonging, then our identities are a key structuring element of how we know" (2000, p.238). Brown and Duguid (1998) maintain that the community of practice is a key context to how individual knowledge is socially and collectively constructed within organisations. It is surprising, therefore, that none of these advocates of the communities of practice concept addresses the concept of how knowledge is codified. Wenger's work on communities of practice (1998) gives particular attention to the concept of reification, which is clearly about how knowledge comes 'out' of people. However, Wenger's discussion of reification is too dense to draw any helpful or practical links with the concept of knowledge codification. Brown and Duguid (2000) for example, make only one relevant reference to copyright being a 'code of codes.' In discussing the 'social life of information' they make no discussion of processes by which information is created.

The main contribution of the communities of practice concept to this thesis, therefore, is in offering a conceptual basis for considering the relative roles of the formal and informal organisation in the codification of knowledge.

2.11 Concluding section

This chapter has shown that the field of knowledge codification as a process is not developed in the KM and wider organisational and management literature. It is important to recognise that there are people involved in process of knowledge codification, and how they are involved in these processes needs to be understood. The literature suggests that there are different forms and

levels of social interaction in the relationship between individual and organisation; some are formal relationships and some are informal relationships within the organisation. The different levels and forms of interaction may be relevant to researching processes of knowledge codification in a knowledge management context.

As codification is seen in the literature as an activity which is associated with the need to manage knowledge, it follows that research is needed within an organisation grappling with the KM phenomenon and developing knowledge management practices. It is important to be aware that there may be a difference between what organisations *say* they are doing under the rhetoric the KM, and what they are *actually* doing about knowledge management. This points to the importance of looking at knowledge management 'on the ground.'

It has been suggested that codification is something we all do in order to communicate our knowledge. It has also been shown that codification is discussed as an important part of knowledge management. The research therefore expects that codification will be found as a feature of actual approaches to knowledge management.

The chapter has pointed to a gap in our understanding of knowledge codification *processes* in a knowledge management context, and identified this as an opportunity for research.

The thesis will now go on to introduce KM and knowledge management activity in the case-study organisation.

CHAPTER 3: KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT IN POST OFFICE CONSULTING

3.1 Introduction

The aim of this thesis is to research processes of knowledge codification as they are actually occurring in an organisation grappling with ideas about knowledge management. The objective of this chapter, therefore, is to introduce the organisation in which the research was conducted - Post Office Consulting - and to highlight the reasons why this was an ideal locus for the research. The chapter shows how Post Office Consulting is a part of the wider KM phenomenon, how it has defined a formal approach to Knowledge Management, and developed a wide range of tools and initiatives to effect the practice of knowledge management in the organisation.

Again capital letters are used to draw a distinction between KM as a phenomenon and knowledge management as practice. This distinction was first made in Chapter 1. It is shown how KM has been broadly embraced within a strategic reconceptualisation of Post Office Consulting as a 'knowledge organisation.' KM has been enshrined with an organisational 'approach' and formally institutionalised in the establishment of a KM Consultancy Group to bring about this wider knowledge vision. A formal Knowledge Programme has been established within Post Office Consulting to provide an overarching framework for the various tools and initiatives which have been developed to improve its ability to work effectively as a 'knowledge organisation.'

It is recognised that there may be a gap between the rhetoric espoused at the organisational level about the need to have a KM strategy, and what is actually happening to effect knowledge management on the ground. Such rhetorical accounts may be more an aspiration of what the organisation would ideally like to see as established practice. As the aim of the thesis is to research knowledge management 'on the ground,' the objective of this introductory chapter is to

reflect what Post Office Consulting says it is doing under the KM banner. This is done by describing the organisation in their own words. It is recognised that the managers who talk about KM in the organisation do not necessarily reflect the organisation as a whole (Morgan, 1986; p.167). However, it is not the objective of this chapter to unlock such issues before the research field is entered, merely to describe what Post Office Consulting says it is doing as a 'knowledge organisation.' It is the wider aim of the thesis to unpick what is happening beneath the words.

3.2 Defining the case-study organisation

It is first necessary to state that this research is not a case-study of Post Office Consulting, even though it is treated within the thesis as the 'case-study organisation.' It is not the 'case-study' because the organisation is not the 'unit of analysis' (Yin, 1994). The definition of the case-study is discussed in more detail in the following chapter on research methods. In the meantime Post Office Consulting is best described as the organisation in which research in the field of Knowledge Management was grounded, although 'case-study organisation' will be used as a simpler term.

The objective of this section is also to establish Post Office Consulting as the case-study organisation rather than the wider Post Office - that is, the Post Office Group - of which Post Office Consulting is a constituent part. This is by way of defining what the thesis treats as the 'organisational level.' It is maintained that separate organisations operate within the Post Office Group, which have their own finances and organisational management structures. In the words of one manager, "saying the Post Office is one organisation is like saying Britain is one country."¹ This is recognised also by Post Office Consulting's Knowledge Director; "each individual part of the organisation is bigger than the majority of companies in the UK, so we

¹ Robin Emery interview 4.11.99

feel like very separate companies.”² Post Office Consulting is therefore taken to be a separate organisation.

3.3 Post Office Consulting’s ‘journey to become a knowledge organisation’

“We are no longer managers in Royal Mail delivering letters, we are knowledge workers in a consultancy delivering knowledge”

(Director and General Manager of Post Office Consulting, December 1998)

It is in the context of Post Office Consulting’s ‘journey to become a knowledge organisation’ that participation in this case-study organisation began. Stemming from collaboration between Post Office Consulting and the Open University on an MBA course in Managing Knowledge, the story of Post Office Consulting’s ‘journey to become a knowledge organisation’ was included as a case-study in the Open University course material.³ Initial interviews with six key representatives in the field of Knowledge Management were conducted specifically for the purposes of writing the case-study. The tone of the interviews reflected this purpose - upbeat, rhetorical, and narrative in style. This was reflected in how the case-study was written and how it came across to the ‘outsiders’ who read it.⁴ Also as a result of this collaboration with the Open University, two programmes were made by the BBC on the subjects of Post Office Consulting’s approach to Knowledge Management, and how they are mobilising the transfer of knowledge within the Post Office.⁵

² Bob Field interview 5.11.99 p.23 of interview transcript

³ Hall, M. (1999) Post Office Consulting - learning to become a ‘knowledge organization.’ Open University B823 residential school student handbook, November 1999 presentation, pp.10-18.

⁴ This was observed when the case-study was used at an OU MBA Residential School in Milton Keynes, February 2000. Notes pp.140-145 of fieldwork journal

⁵ Opening the Mail on Radio 4, and Business Café, broadcast on BBC2 under the Open University schedule, March 1999

Post Office Consulting were keen to be involved in these activities - produced principally for an external audience - as it gave them an opportunity to tell their 'story' to the outside world.⁶ Post Office Consulting representatives were also visible at a number of conferences, for example, Managing and Transferring Best Practices in Innovation, Leadership and Knowledge⁷ where the Leader of the KM Practitioner Group was speaking on the subject of 'Best Practice in Knowledge Management - the RM Consulting Story.' Also on 28 October 1999 two members of Post Office Consulting spoke at the Institute of Personnel Directors (IPD) conference in Harrogate, where they described their approach to the Knowledge Programme and Knowledge Interviews.⁸ There was also benchmarking with a number of other organisations, for example, Motorola and Rolls Royce. The Knowledge Director, who has attended many KM conferences, believes that in comparison to other organisations developing KM approaches, Post Office Consulting is a "developer and leader in the tacit area."⁹

This external recognition of Post Office Consulting in the field of Knowledge Management is described by the Chief Executive of the Post Office;

"The Post Office is emphasising innovation and knowledge management. The development of knowledge management is being 'spear-headed' by our internal consultancy unit, Post Office Consulting, who have been recognised several times over the last few years through awards such as the Economist's Knowledge Management Award and the HR Excellence Award, as well as being a case study for the Open University on knowledge management."¹⁰

So what is the 'story' about Post Office Consulting's quest to become a 'knowledge organisation? How did Post Office Consulting come to position itself as the 'hub' of knowledge

⁶ The thesis later considers how the codification of the narrative was not just for external audiences.

⁷ 8-9 June 1999 in London, organised by Business Intelligence

⁸ Reported in Post Office Consulting News issue 0065 29.10.99

⁹ Bob Field interview 17.5.00 count 1/A 065

¹⁰ Quoted in the inside cover of the Post Office Consulting Knowledge Management Consultancy's promotional brochure 'The Knowledge Business.'

within the Post Office, as described in the two following quotes from Post Office Consulting's 1999-2002 business plan?¹¹

“PO Consulting customises knowledge for the postal and related distribution markets; it acquires knowledge, shapes it, enhances it, deploys it and preserves it ... the successful management and exploitation of knowledge will become ever more important to the transformation of Royal Mail, the Post Office and the global postal network ...”

“Acting as role model of a learning organisation, PO Consulting will lead in facilitating the development of knowledge management in the Post Office and knowledge management products for the world Post Office market”

The roots of the new ‘knowledge focus’ can be traced back to the organisational restructuring process started in 1992, when Royal Mail took the radical step to completely overhaul the way its central management headquarters supported the Mail’s operations. While some managers were retained as the Strategic Headquarters for Royal Mail under the direct control of its Executive Committee (which later became ‘Service Delivery’), Royal Mail turned the rest of its management divisions over to selling their expertise as consultants on the ‘internal market’. Thus Consultancy Services Group was formed to provide project and management support to Royal Mail, but increasingly over the years, the demand for consultancy services has come from other areas of the Post Office Group, as well as from a growing number of external clients in post offices overseas. In recognition of its client base within the wider Post Office, Royal Mail Consulting - as it had become known in 1997 - moved from under the control of Royal Mail in early 1999 and became part of Post Office Services Group, which provides support services across the PO structure. At the same time merging with the consultancy wing of Post Office Counters Ltd, the new organisation became Post Office Consulting. With approximately 1300

¹¹ RM Consulting Business Plan 1999-2002

full-time and associate consultants, and turning over around £60m a year in 1999-2000, Post Office Consulting is certainly the largest 'internal consultancy' in the UK.

When the internal consultancy paradigm was introduced, the Director and General Manager (the 'DGM') believed it brought a fundamental transformation to the focus of the business - a realisation that the knowledge of the people who make up the organisation - and the way they interact to combine their knowledge and expertise around client projects - is what defines Post Office Consulting as a 'knowledge organisation.' In terms of developing a knowledge focus, the Director and General Manager freely admits that it was a question of both luck and management; "we have actually used the consultancy paradigm really as a way of turning the headquarters of Royal Mail into a knowledge business."¹²

In the early days Consultancy Services Group reflected the traditional functional structure of Royal Mail's former management headquarters, with 6 large divisions covering operations, planning, marketing, personnel, finance and IT and a Board director controlling each area. The DGM claims that the problem with the functional approach was that it appeared to work against the free movement of people, resources and information between the divisions, which he describes as separate "fiefdoms" under the hierarchical control of directors whose natural objective was to protect the resources and secure the performance of their own division. This meant that a lot of project work was being duplicated in different parts of the organisation, when the aim should have been to focus the best mix of consultant expertise around a client solution, regardless of the consultant's functional 'home' within the business.

In 1997 therefore, the second main phase of restructuring aimed to abandon the 'command and control' model of the organisation. The aim was to 'flatten' the hierarchical structure and do away with line management in order to free up the Consultants to generate their own work, and the senior managers whose time it was felt was better spent applying their expertise within the

¹² Interview with Malcolm Hart, 11.12.98

Post Office than to the administration of line management. The functional divisions were also replaced by 23 'Practitioner Groups' which represent groupings of skills and expertise more tightly focused around the operational requirements of project management (in such areas as Road Transport, Delivery, Mailing Solutions), and around the 'softer' aspects of consultancy (for example, Marketing, People and Organisational Change). These Practitioner Groups were given a considerable degree of autonomy over how they meet their targets.

Another significant development at this stage - designed to support the move towards more flexible working practices - was the introduction of 'location independent working'. This means that many Consultants are no longer required to have a physical base at one of Post Office Consulting's London, Chesterfield or Swindon offices, but are given mobile communication facilities¹³ and are able to work remotely with other project members in 'virtual teams'. The use of new ICTs (Information and Communications Technologies) is therefore fundamental in underpinning the way Post Office Consulting believes it has transformed itself into a more fluid, networked organisation, enabling Consultants and their knowledge to come together around client projects in ways that would not have been possible under the former structure.

While line management was abandoned and Practitioner Groups were given freedom over how to meet their performance targets, the Groups were required to adhere to four 'core processes' - strategy, commercial, assets, and knowledge. These are considered essential to ensuring that all Practitioner Groups work towards common goals and standards, and do not end up moving in a different direction from the rest of the organisation. Each of the core processes has an overall manager who sits on an Executive Committee, which has responsibility for overseeing the management of the core processes across the organisation. The core processes also have representatives at Board level, who ensure that the core processes concur with overall business strategy - hence the appointment of a Knowledge Director in 1997.

¹³ 'LIW' Consultants all have mobile phones and portable computers running Lotus Notes

Also key parts of Post Office Consulting's strategy to become a 'knowledge organisation', were the establishment of a Knowledge Management Practitioner Group and an internal Knowledge Programme to act as catalysts in operationalising this broader knowledge vision for the organisation. The KM Practitioner Group was the formal 'home' for many of the tools and initiatives which were developed in this context, while the Knowledge Programme provided a cross-organisational forum to diffuse and implement the use of the tools across Post Office Consulting. Both of these formal structures were key parts of Post Office Consulting's approach to operationalising KM, and are introduced in the following section.

3.4 Post Office Consulting's approach to Knowledge Management

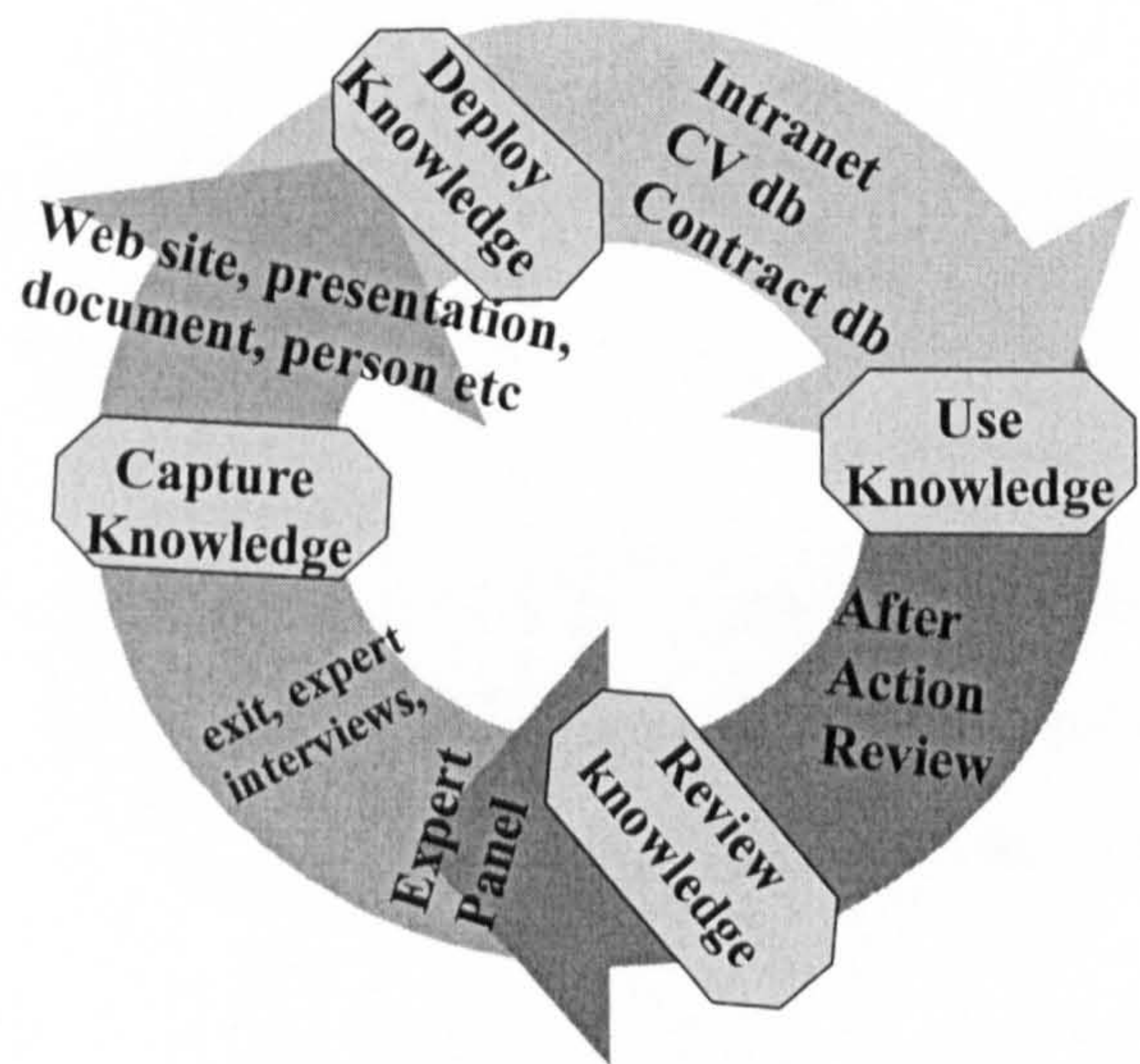
The story so far has covered the restructuring and development of the organisation which has enabled Post Office Consulting to reconceptualise its relationship with its customers in terms of the delivery of knowledge. The discussion now turns to the specific approaches which were adopted in order to bring about this vision. These can be viewed as two types. First, there are models and heuristics which have been (in the words of this thesis) codified in order to define the organisation's approach to processes of knowledge management. Second, there are specific structures - namely the Knowledge Management Practitioner Group and the Knowledge Programme - which have been formally institutionalised in order to effect the practice of knowledge management. These will be discussed in turn.

3.4.1 Models and heuristics for KM

The most important of the models and heuristics used to define Post Office Consulting's approach to KM, is what is known as the 'Knowledge Process Model.' This model - shown in Figure 3.1 - was formulated in order to guide the various elements of the Knowledge Programme. The Knowledge Process Model is a cyclical model consisting of four stages - capture, deploy, use, review - which aims to reflect a sense that knowledge management is a

continuous process. The constituent parts of the Knowledge Programme are positioned within the cycle depending on what the primary focus on the knowledge management initiative is. In Figure 3.1, examples of knowledge management tools and initiatives are highlighted according to where they sit within the cycle.

Figure 3.1 Post Office Consulting’s Knowledge Process Model



The following quote from the DGM on the Post Office Consulting Induction CD¹⁴ conveys how the Knowledge Process Model has been sanctioned as the organisation’s ‘approach’ to the knowledge management process;

“we have developed a knowledge process, a cyclical activity, which produces knowledge from the abundance of workers ... feeds it into a cycle by capturing it, then sends it out round the consultancy using a whole range of tools and techniques to deploy it. Once deployed, we can then apply the knowledge to our customer’s requirements, review that application, see what we’ve learned, and feed the knowledge back into the knowledge capture process.”

¹⁴ There is an induction module on CD-ROM which all newcomers to Post Office Consulting are required to work through.

Another significant heuristic has been developed in order to define Post Office Consulting's approach to 'what is knowledge.' This is referred to as the 'Knowledge Equation' and is defined in one of the early editions of the Post Office Consulting Journal - itself initiated within the Knowledge Programme for sharing knowledge:

"we know the RM Consulting position on knowledge i.e. knowledge = information + [people, skills and experience]"¹⁵

The 'Knowledge Equation' also appears in a published journal as a manifestation of Post Office Consulting's 'approach' to knowledge:

"Although we work on the principle that knowledge cannot be managed, we believe that the enablers that support knowledge share and knowledge creation can be managed. These enablers consist of information, skills, experience, personal capability and culture. They can be expressed in the following way:

knowledge = (information + (skills + experience) x personal capability)^{culture}"¹⁶

In these two quotes, the use of 'we' here is akin to the 'royal we,' where an individual is speaking on behalf of an institution. The implication is that this is the organisation's approach, and not simply the view of the person(s) who codified the equation.

3.4.2 *The Knowledge Management Practitioner Group*

The Knowledge Management Practitioner Group was formed at the time of the 1997 move from Consultancy Services Group to RM Consulting. It was championed principally by the DGM, and was established first and foremost as the formal location in the organisation for the

¹⁵ RM Consulting Journal Issue 3, March 1998 p.10

¹⁶ Getting on the I-Way for Knowledge. *Knowledge Management*, 2(3),. November 1998, p. 14

development of the knowledge management initiatives and tools which constitute the Knowledge Programme. During the course of this research the size of the Group fluctuated around 40 to 45 members. For the first two years approximately 75% of its work was 'internally focused,' that is, the Group was financed internally by Post Office Consulting in order to develop a range of knowledge management initiatives and tools. These were developed first and foremost for use within Post Office Consulting, in order to support Post Office Consulting's knowledge organisation strategy. Once the use of these initiatives and tools were 'embedded' within working practices in the organisation, the intention for the KM Practitioner Group is to generate its own revenue by selling these approaches as part of its KM 'tool kit' within the internal Post Office market.

In order to achieve its objective of becoming self-financed on the internal market, the Knowledge Management Practitioner Group - or KM Consultancy - as it prefers to be known, has produced a glossy brochure on its consultancy services, with individual descriptions of the KM tools which have been developed and their uses. Figure 3.2 on the following page shows how the Knowledge Management Consultancy's defines its approach to 'What is Knowledge Management?'¹⁷ This reveals an approach to KM influenced by some of the key knowledge management concepts - particularly the distinction between tacit and explicit knowledge - which was reviewed in the previous two chapters.

3.4.3 The Knowledge Programme

The Knowledge Programme is the overarching framework for the collection of initiatives developed to support the way Post Office Consulting works as a knowledge organisation. A detailed 'journey plan' describing the stages of development of the Knowledge Programme and highlighting its constituent projects is given as Appendix A at the end of the thesis.

¹⁷ From the KM Practitioner Group's promotional brochure 'The Knowledge Business

Figure 3.2 Post Office Consulting's definition of 'what is Knowledge Management'

What is Knowledge Management?

Knowledge Management is about gaining competitive advantage through the active management of Intellectual Capital, the way knowledge is developed, shared, and exploited. Knowledge in its various forms is probably the single most important asset our business has, exceeding tangible assets in its contribution to the value of our business.

It is necessary to distinguish between the two main types of knowledge - explicit knowledge and tacit knowledge. Explicit knowledge is tangible. It can be described as formal, systematic and objective and is largely articulated in words, numbers and pictures. Knowledge in this form can be derived from a number of sources and shared fairly easily. Tacit knowledge is intangible. It refers to the insights, intuitions and expertise which largely remain hidden in peoples brains (skills, experience, creativity, personality). This kind of knowledge is always personal to an individual and difficult to articulate, yet, it is necessary in order to make sense of the explicit knowledge in context. Knowledge management tries to capture this tacit knowledge and share it around the organisation so others can learn from it.

Much of what people know cannot be written down and often people do not appreciate the extent of the knowledge they have until they come to use it. Thus, Knowledge Management is about connecting people with people as well as about connecting people with information. Knowledge Management improves communications and collaboration through informal social networks as well as through formal systems and networks designed to help people access the knowledge they need.

Key to a successful Knowledge Management implementation is a culture that encourages the creation of sharing of knowledge and that is open to learning. Therefore, cultural issues are very important.

Knowledge Management can not be purchased as an 'off the shelf product' but it has to be tailored and designed around the needs of an organisation.

According to Paul Butcher - Post Office Consulting's Knowledge Core Process Manager, who is responsible to managing the overall Programme - the Knowledge Programme has dual objectives:¹⁸

¹⁸ Paul Butcher interview 11.12.98

- to equip Consultants with the tools and techniques to enable them to ‘capture, deploy, use and review knowledge’ (these are the elements of the ‘knowledge core process model’ discussed in earlier in this section)
- and to deploy these tools and techniques in the wider Post Office Group as part of Post Office Consulting’s ongoing aim to generate more business from knowledge management consultancy

The Knowledge Programme was instigated in 1997 and may run for up to 5 years. It is not possible to say at this stage how long the process will take. Indeed, the Knowledge Programme is often characterised as a journey - as shown in Appendix A - where the milestones represent a vision of what Post Office Consulting would like to achieve along the way.

3.5 Knowledge Management tools and initiatives in Post Office Consulting

A major feature of the reconceptualisation of Post Office Consulting as a ‘knowledge organisation’ has been to develop tools and initiatives to facilitate a better way of working;

“The transformation of RM Consulting into a knowledge business began in 1996 with a variety of knowledge-based initiatives which have since been developed into an integrated programme of projects.”¹⁹

There have been a number of tools developed - for example, a virtual library, CV/Skills database, After Action Reviews, the Post Office Consulting Journal - all of which are positioned somewhere within the capture, deploy, use, review sectors of the Knowledge Process Model. This section focuses on the Knowledge Interview technique, which was developed within the ‘knowledge capture’ stream of the Knowledge Programme. For reasons which should become

¹⁹ Surfacing tacit from explicit: The Knowledge Interview. *Knowledge Management*, 2(6), March 1999, p. 22

apparent when describing the Knowledge Interview process, there is clear resonance with what the tool is trying to achieve in a knowledge management context, and the focus on this research into the codification of knowledge.

3.5.1 The Knowledge Interview technique

For the purposes of this thesis, the principle among the tools developed by Post Office Consulting is the Knowledge Interview technique, formerly known as Entry-Expert-Exit Interviews, or the '3Es.' This section introduces the Knowledge Interview, which was developed within Post Office Consulting and has become considered as one of the success stories of Post Office Consulting's approach to KM. It features in many instances of Post Office Consulting recounting their story about KM. For example, in an interview with Paul Butcher in the journal *People Management*, he describes the Knowledge Interview as a well established tool, which has already proven to deliver benefits;

"The knowledge interview was used recently when the head of the Post Office Services Group was due to move to a new job as head of Royal Mail Service Delivery. He had set up the Services Group, which included the Post Office's Catering Service, the third largest operation of its kind in the UK. There was a huge amount of background knowledge involved, covering the way the group had been established and the reasons why catering was the first service in the Post Office to be outsourced. It was all recovered through the Knowledge Interview process."

"The knowledge interview has proved successful, producing big savings."²⁰

²⁰ Collection time. *People Management*, 28 October 1999, p. 71

The technique has also been written about in the journal *Knowledge Management*, where Paul repeats the justification for developing the technique;

“Best estimates indicate that up to 10% of tacit knowledge can be effectively captured and transferred through existing mechanisms - this leaves 80%+ still untapped.”²¹

A fuller description of the Knowledge Interview process is given in Figure 3.3 on the following page, which is taken from the KM Consultancy’s promotional literature.

The origins of the Knowledge Interview were in the standard exit-type interview. Philip Connelly, one of the original developers of the tools explains that the original impetus came from the limitations of the 20 questions type approach to exit interviews.²² The basic idea originally started as a means of ‘capturing’ the knowledge of people leaving the organisation:

“we found that in RM Consulting we have over a thousand consultants and we were losing 15% of these people, either to other businesses in Royal Mail, or leaving the business completely and moving out to another organisation. Now that number ... is now nearer 18 or 20% ... so there was a need there that people suddenly realised that we were losing a large proportion of our people and they were taking expert knowledge with them.”

They extended the idea from the Exit interview to interviews that could be used to capture ongoing expertise - the Expert Interview - and possibly also to new people coming into the business who bring in expertise - hence the Entry interview.

²¹ Surfacing tacit from explicit: The Knowledge Interview. *Knowledge Management*, 2(6), March 1999, p. 22

²² Philip Connelly interview 22.3.99 p.2 of interview transcript

Figure 3.3 Post Office Consulting's Knowledge Interview technique

Description

The Knowledge Interview provides a framework within which the tacit and explicit knowledge of consultants can be captured; When they join; as they are recognised as experts; before they leave. The product delivers expertise in structured interviewing techniques, identifies appropriate tools to capture the knowledge and develop a process which links this activity to an organisation's knowledge process.

Aims

The main aim of the Knowledge Interview is to support a Knowledge Management infrastructure which allows the organisation to better manage and retain its sources of know-how, skills, experiences and information. Knowledge Interviews provide a context for learning in organisations through the capture of learning points and by producing a more rigorous evaluation of the decision making processes. Studies estimate that around 80% of organisational knowledge remains untapped because it resides in the heads of individuals. Whilst key decisions and their outcomes are important pieces of knowledge, the assumptions that lead people to those decisions are equally important and are likely to have a longer 'shelf life.' The Knowledge Interview seeks to surface the tacit assumptions out of the explicit evidence.

Features

The Knowledge Interview consists of two structured interview sessions followed by the production of written , audio or visual outputs. Knowledge interview training is delivered through a two day workshop which provides participants with an interview framework, interview process, interview training, interview documentation and interview tools.

The initial period of development of the technique involved looking at different models for capturing knowledge, not just interviewing, but also software tools such as HyperKnowledge which is a structured interactive tools in which the expert's knowledge is captured alongside key documentation. However, as Philip Connelly explains;

“you lose the one to one interaction, where you lose that eye contact, you lose the flow of discussion, because at times the interviewer is typing and the interviewee is sitting around waiting for the next question.”²³

Thus the building up of the map got in the way of the dynamic flow of the interview situation, and that this would impede the surfacing of important tacit knowledge, and ‘gems’. They looked at a few other software approaches used by organisations such as DTI, Midland Bank, but in the end were impressed by the PEACE model for interviewing used by the Metropolitan Police. They therefore adopted an approach which was based on a more dynamic and flowing interview approach, but an approach which is intended to be managed by the Interviewer.

Figure 3.4 on the following page outlines the technique for conducting the Interview itself, and shows how a prescriptive process has been defined in order to inform the Interviewer about how the Interview should be conducted.

From the discussion given in this section, it is clear that the Knowledge Interview technique, as a key tool in Post Office Consulting’s approach to KM, has a clear resonance with the research focus on knowledge codification. Claims that the Knowledge Interview is about making tacit knowledge explicit directly link the Knowledge Interview with the conceptual treatment, made in the previous chapter, of knowledge codification as a process by which ‘tacit knowledge’ can become explicit. The potential to operationalise the research around the users of the Knowledge Interview tool is clearly a relevant opportunity.

²³ Philip Connelly interview 22.3.99 p.4 of interview transcript

Figure 3.4 Description of the Knowledge Interview process

Stage 2 [The Main Interview]

This stage of the Interview is where you obtain and deal with the interviewee's recollection of events.

There are two ways of obtaining this account:

- The 'Cognitive Approach'
- The 'Management of conversation'

The 'Cognitive Approach'

The interviewee is asked to think back to the event and mentally re-live what happened; thus telling everything that is initially remembered with minimal interference (Free Recall). This is followed with probing questions which relate to the areas identified in the interview schedule. Areas of specific interest can be pursued when the 'Free Recall' attempts are concluded. This approach is designed to make use of how memory works and the way in which information is stored and retrieved.

The 'Management of Conversation'

The interviewee is asked to provide an account of what happened. The interviewer sub-divides this account into a number of parts; each part being pursued in turn in a series of 'second accounts' to obtain more detail. Before each 'second account' is concluded, the interviewer can probe for more detail and then link that section to the next area of second account.

The cognitive approach provides an opportunity to obtain the interviewee's account with minimal interference. The process of seeking recall by different perspectives provides an inbuilt means of checking an accuracy and developing detail. It is, however, dependent upon an interviewee who is willing and able to respond freely. Essentially, the interviewee has control over where the account will go.

The management of conversation puts the interviewer into the position of control. After the first account, the interviewer decides the sections of the interview and how the interview develops.

3.6 Recent changes within the Post Office and Post Office Consulting

The recent history of Post Office Consulting is one of considerable and ongoing change. This thesis was only able to see Post Office Consulting as a snapshot in its evolution within the wider Post Office, itself facing untold challenges within a rapidly changing global market for postal and distribution services. When this thesis was completed, neither the Post Office, nor Post

Office Consulting existed in the forms they had been in while the fieldwork was being conducted.

On March 26 2001 The Post Office became called Consignia to coincide with its new status as a government-owned PLC. This move was made with foresight of the imminent deregulation of the UK postal market and the loss of the Post Office's monopoly status in 2002. In the words of the Post Office's Chief Executive;

While the familiar, and trusted, brands of Royal Mail, Parcelforce Worldwide and the network of Post Office branches are unaffected, adopting a bold new corporate name is a deliberate symbol of change both inside the Post Office and importantly to the world at large.²⁴

This process also saw internal restructuring. The close of financial year 2000/1 saw the break up of Post Office Consulting as it is known in this thesis. An internal 'sourcing' review²⁵ started in November 2000 resulted in the restructuring of Post Office Consulting in a major overhaul of how their chief client - Royal Mail Service Delivery - organises its use of 'consultancy service.' In recognition that many of Post Office Consulting's 'consultants' worked only for Service Delivery, for example, in an engineering capacity, these people were moved directly back into Service Delivery and Royal Mail's divisions. Service Delivery retained a somewhat reduced number of what some people in Post Office Consulting always thought of as the true consultants, which is where a number of the former Knowledge Management Practitioner Group were relocated.

²⁴ Post Office Consulting News issue 0183 16.1.01 - message from the Chairman 'Consignia: A sign to the world that we mean business.'

²⁵ Up to this point Post Office Consulting's main client in the Post Office was 'Service Delivery' - the principle central management organisation of the Post Office Group. They would be responsible for major investment projects, for example, to which Post Office Consulting consultants would be sub-contracted. Service Delivery carried out regular reviews of the cost effectiveness of the service they receive from their suppliers. This sourcing review was conducted by Pricewaterhouse Coopers.

This is not raised as a problem for the research, particularly as the thesis does not take the organisation as the 'unit of analysis.' However, it was felt important to provide a post-script to these changes, in order to stress that the story of KM Post Office Consulting, as it was, situates the research in the emerging KM and knowledge management context within the organisation.

3.7 Concluding remarks

This chapter has shown how members of Post Office Consulting have embraced the KM phenomenon, defined a formal approach to Knowledge Management, and developed a wide range of tools and initiatives to effect the practice of knowledge management in the organisation. It has presented clear evidence that Post Office Consulting is fundamentally a part of the KM phenomenon raised in the previous two chapters.

It has also been shown in this chapter that some of the tools are defined by Post Office Consulting as 'knowledge capture' tools - in particular the Knowledge Interview tool - rendering research in Post Office Consulting particularly apposite to the thesis focus on the codification of knowledge in a knowledge management context.

For these reasons, Post Office Consulting meets the principle criteria needed in order to operationalise the research aims.

The following chapter - Research methods - will now go on to discuss in detail how a research agenda was developed within Post Office Consulting, and how research into processes of knowledge codification in a knowledge management context was conducted.

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH METHODS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter is divided into 5 sections;

- **Research methodology**

This section describes the overall methodological approach taken to the research and discusses the underlying epistemology. It highlights the major implications for the thesis in adopting such a methodology.

- **Participation in the research field**

This section discusses the nature of the researcher's participation in the research field.

- **Data collection methods**

This section describes the specific methods used to collect the data and what data were collected in the process. It highlights the major issues involved in using these methods and considers the limitations of the data.

- **Data analysis**

This section describes how the data were analysed according to a conceptual framework for examining levels of social interaction in the knowledge codification process.

- **Boundaries and limitations of the data**

This section considers how the research is bounded by the data which were collected.

4.2 Research methodology

4.2.1 *Approach to the research*

First it would be helpful to restate the aims of the research. These were given in Chapter 1 as:

- to explore and understand better the concept of knowledge codification in the context of knowledge management in the organisation
- to examine processes of knowledge codification as they are actually occurring in an organisation grappling with ideas about knowledge management
- to examine who is involved in processes of knowledge codification, what characterises their relationships, and what other factors are involved in an organisational context

These aims necessarily involve taking a close look at what is being done within an organisation and what people are doing in the process. The research approach is therefore fundamentally qualitative. The process of knowledge codification cannot be researched effectively using quantitative methods.

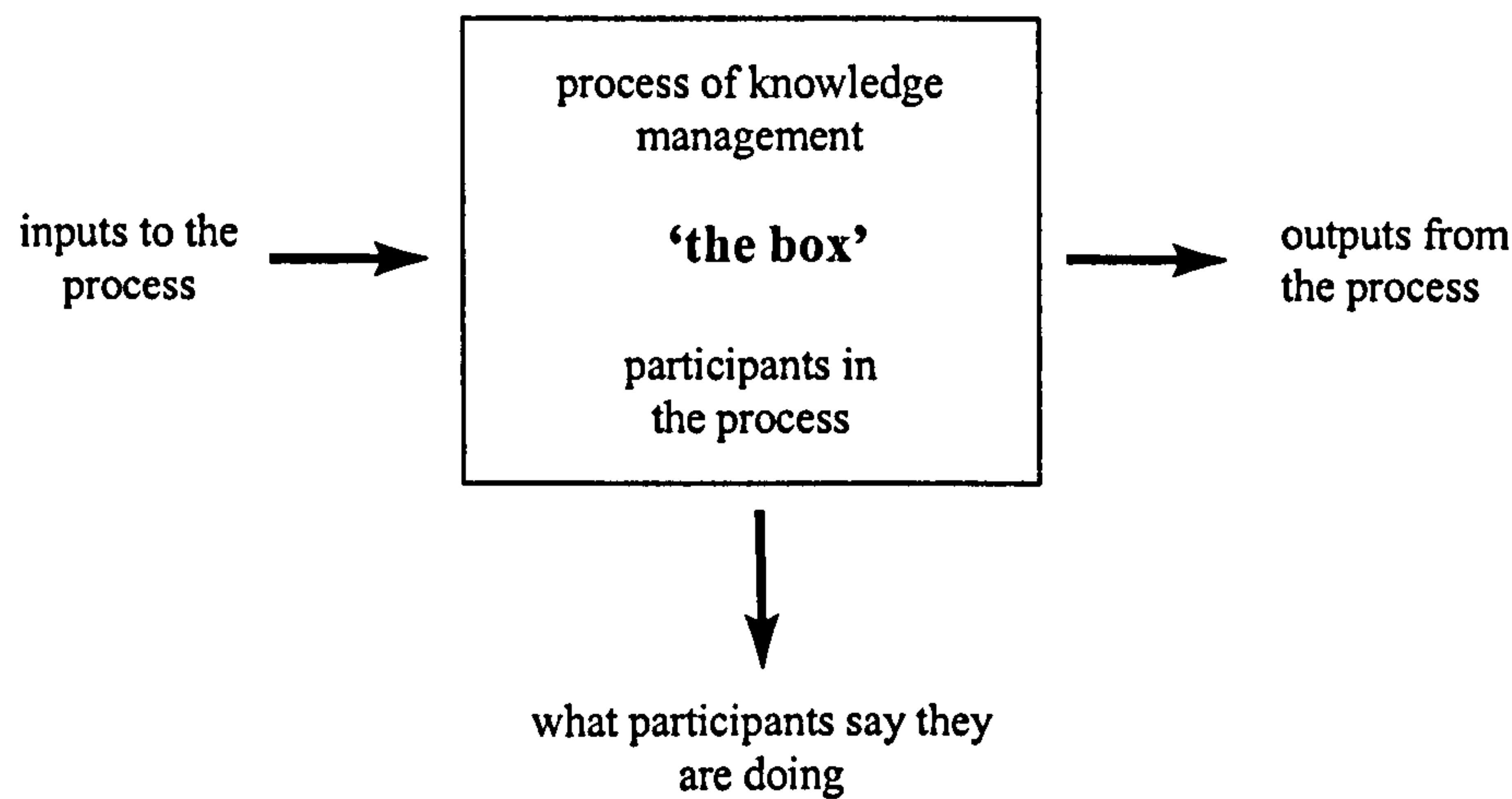
The methodology taken also depends upon one's predominant epistemological preference for positivist or phenomenological research. This is a common distinction between two broad paradigms in the pursuit of knowledge, which are clearly described by Easterby-Smith et al (1991). They explain that while positivism is based on an assumption that there is an external world which can be objectively detected, phenomenology does not see the world as 'objective and exterior', but treats 'reality' as constructed in the sense we make of the social world around us.

As explained in the introduction to this thesis, a preference for viewing knowledge as socially constructed leads the research to be conducted in a way which recognises the importance of

understanding other people and their perspectives. It also implies a need to get grounded in the research field in order to see what is happening first-hand. This was a realisation early on in the research process: Rather than reading the seemingly endless posturing and positioning over what characterises knowledge management is, it is necessary to find out for oneself by researching knowledge management in action. A useful heuristic in this type of research is to think in terms of getting ‘inside the box.’

In the context of this research, the ‘box’ might be described as the black box of activity around knowledge management where participants are interacting in order to bring knowledge management about.

Figure 4.1 The research ‘black box’



There are two perspectives from which to research the knowledge management activity. From outside the box, where you can look at the inputs the process and the outputs of the process, and ask people what they say they are - or more likely were - doing. Alternatively, you can get inside the box and become a part of the process, as well as looking at the inputs and outputs.

The classic reference to this mode of research is Whyte's Street Corner Society (1981), where the research was conducted most effectively by becoming a part of the Cornerville community and gaining the trust and acceptance of its members, in order really to understand the context of their behaviour and the nature of their interaction.

In order to address the aims and objectives of this research, there is clearly a need to get inside the box. A thorough understanding of what an organisation and its people are doing in the context of knowledge management and knowledge codification ideally requires participation within the organisation. It is also necessary to have a longitudinal perspective to the fieldwork if the focus is on the codification of knowledge as *process*. Participating in the work of the organisation is one way of achieving the necessary level of insight. However, it is not possible to do this type of research just by interviewing people and asking them what they are doing. It also requires observation of what they are doing in the course of their work.

The research therefore adopts the methodology of participant observation as most relevant to the specific field of enquiry. Yin (1994, p.87) describes participant observation as a "special mode of observation in which you are not merely a passive observer. Instead, you may assume a variety of roles within a case study situation and may actually participate in the events being studied." According to Jorgensen (1989, p.12),

"the methodology of participant observation is exceptional for studying processes, relationships among people and events, the organization of people and events, continuities over time, and patterns, as well as the immediate sociocultural contexts in which human existence unfolds."

The need to gain an inside view of a research situation is both an opportunity afforded by participant observation (Yin, 1994), and one of its fundamental objectives (Jorgensen, 1989).

The difference between having an insider and an outsider view relates to the notion of there being a 'box' to get into.¹

According to Easterby-Smith et al's different modes for conducting research through participant observation (1991 p.96), this research fits into the category of 'researcher as employee.' They explain that entering the research field as an employee allows the researcher to interact naturally with the other members of the organisation, and not to obtrude as someone purely there to conduct research. The extent to which the researcher is overt or covert or about his/ her research activities is a particular ethical issue which Whyte (1984), Easterby-Smith et al and Gill and Johnson (1997) highlight when conducting such research. In the case of this research, these issues are addressed in section 4.3 later in this chapter.

There is a close association between participant observation and researching case-studies, but as both Yin (1994, p.12) and Jorgensen (1989, p.19) point out, they are not the same thing: Case-studies may be researched by participant observation, and often participant observation is practised as a form of case-study. This is perhaps the best way to describe this research; case-studies are used to analyse the data, but the data were researched using methods of participant observation. Yin (1994) thinks of the case-study more as an all-encompassing research strategy than a methodology per se. It is particularly relevant to use a case-study strategy when it is important to research the phenomenon in context. As an objective of the research is to consider the contextual factors which affect the codification of knowledge in an organisational environment, researching the phenomenon with a case-study approach is necessary in order to understand the codification of knowledge in context.

It is important to consider how this research relates to the definition of a case-study. As Yin (1994, p.21) explains, the definition of the case relates to the 'unit of analysis.' As the unit of

¹ The point that the concepts of the insider and outsider are particularly relevant in research about knowledge management was made by J-C Spender at a seminar at the Open University in March 1999.

analysis is not the organisation, the case-study is not therefore Post Office Consulting, although it was explained in Chapter 3 that Post Office Consulting is referred to as the ‘case-study organisation’ for convenience. There is also one predominant case of knowledge management in the form of the Argentina Knowledge Capture Project (AKAP), but the unit of analysis is not the project. As the aim of the research is to examine processes of knowledge codification, it follows that the process should be treated as the unit of analysis, and thus codification processes are the case-studies in this research.

The term ‘grounded’ has been used to describe the need to examine knowledge management processes ‘on the ground,’ and a grounded approach was taken to the extent that this was a research phenomenon which required discovery. The literature review shows there is little of substance written about knowledge codification in the context of knowledge management and organisations, and there is certainly no theory which appears directly relevant enough to test. It has therefore been necessary to become grounded in the research field and to explore new insights which the fieldwork could offer.

However, it is important to stress that this is not grounded theory in the strict sense propounded by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and Corbin and Strauss (1990) although the grounded theory approach does depend upon participant observation (Jorgensen, 1989). In grounded theory the researcher constructs new theory through induction with the research setting, and this follows a highly structured approach to theory development through the systematic coding of data sources which allows the theory to emerge. Thus pure grounded theorists would have no hypotheses to test or even preconceptions of what the researcher might find. Although this research did not have an hypothesis as such, a set of statements akin to Yin’s (1994) theoretical propositions were presented in Chapter 1. Furthermore the aim of the research was not to develop a new theory of knowledge codification in the organisation. The building of such a theory is not relevant to the exploratory nature of the research.

4.2.2 *Selection of the case-study organisation*

The case-study organisation is Post Office Consulting, which was introduced in the previous chapter. The involvement of this organisation in the research came about initially through collaboration with the Open University over the use of a Post Office Consulting case study. As explained in section 4.3 below, this led to temporary membership of the Knowledge Management Practitioner Group of Post Office Consulting and subsequent involvement with the Argentina Knowledge Capture Project.

By virtue of the serendipity of these circumstances, Post Office Consulting was clearly too good a case-study organisation to miss. As shown in the previous chapter, Post Office Consulting's activities in KM and the resonance of a number of its knowledge management tools and techniques with the research questions made this an ideal case-study organisation. Furthermore the opportunity to participate in the Argentina Knowledge Capture Project was perfect timing in terms of the fieldwork. Access to case-study organisations is often a difficulty with this type of research (Easterby-Smith et al, 1991), so it is important to take these opportunities when they are presented. However, it is quite possible that had the AKAP opportunity not arisen, the research design and process would have looked different. In particular it might not have been possible to research knowledge codification as *process* in a knowledge management context to the same degree. So it is not just a question of selecting the case-studies, but to some degree the opportunities presented by the case-study help define the boundaries and focus of the research. This is, after all, research in the real world. As Whyte (1984, p.27) explains, "participant observation offers the advantage of serendipity; significant discoveries that were unanticipated."

There is also a need to put something back into the organisation, rather than just 'taking out' as a researcher, but also contributing something to the organisation in return. The opportunity to work as a member of the Argentina Knowledge Capture Project team enabled the research to

contribute directly to the work of Post Office Consulting, at the same time as benefiting from participating in the process. This is part of the negotiation process involved in conducting management research and gaining access to organisations. The way one handles relationships with others is a critical part of one's involvement in the organisation (Easterby-Smith et al, 1991).

Post Office Consulting and the opportunities for participant observation within it, clearly fit this research into more than one of Langrish's categories for selecting cases.² There is a large element of studying 'the one next door' in the sense that this research opportunity presented itself and it was taken; as Langrish says, an historian chancing across a cellar full of documents and manuscripts would jump for joy, and there is no reason why the selection of the case study should not be viewed in the same light. This organisation to some degree forms the 'representative' case, in that here is an organisation which is formulating some practices and principles around knowledge management, and there is an opportunity to view these in an organisational context.

4.2.3 *Relevance of the methodology to the research focus*

The section summarises the relevance of the methodology used to the phenomenon under research and the research questions asked. According to Jorgensen (1989, p.13), participant observation is most appropriate when certain 'minimal conditions' are present. This section therefore takes each of these 'minimal conditions' and responds with how they meet the research focus.

- *"the research problem is concerned with human meanings and interactions viewed from the insider's perspective"*

²This is from a working paper given out at a seminar: Case Studies as Biological Research Process, by John Langrish. Institute of Advanced Studies, Manchester Metropolitan University, Research Paper 67, undated.

⇒ the research is about the codification of knowledge in an organisational context, with a particular emphasis on the levels of social interaction at which these processes occur. This necessarily involves researching what participants are doing and understanding their perspectives from within the process.

- *“the phenomenon of investigation is observable within an everyday life situation or setting”*

⇒ involvement in the KM Practitioner Group of Post Office Consulting and the Argentina Knowledge Capture Project was indeed a real life situation, and knowledge codification was clearly observable within that context.

- *“the researcher is able to gain access to an appropriate setting”*

⇒ access to Post Office Consulting and participation in the Argentina Knowledge Capture Project were negotiated with key gatekeepers to the organisation in terms of this research.

- *“the phenomenon is sufficiently limited in size and location to be studied as a case”*

⇒ it became necessary to select certain of the cases of knowledge codification to use in the analysis, largely because there was more than enough data to deal with arising from participation in AKAP. Despite the eventual amount of data which emerged, my actual time commitment to AKAP was well judged, even though some periods were quite hectic in terms of both project commitment and as a researcher. In terms of time, AKAP ran from inception to end in nine months, which was a good amount of time for the fieldwork if not a little late finishing.

- *“study questions are appropriate for case-study”*

⇒ the objective of researching knowledge codification as process lends itself nicely to case-study through participant observation, where the case-study is defined as a particular case of knowledge codification.

- *“ the research problem can be addressed by qualitative data gathered by direct observation and other means pertinent to the field setting”*

⇒ research into knowledge codification from the perspective of the participants involved and their social interaction necessarily involves gathering predominantly qualitative data.

Becoming a part of the process enabled direct observation of what was going on, along with the collection of other, predominantly electronic, sources of data.

4.3 Participation in the research field

The aim of this section is to discuss the nature of participation in the research field. In this type of research there is clearly a need to recognise one's role as a researcher. Whereas in the positivist tradition there is a tendency to view the researcher as detached from and impartial to the process, a phenomenological approach recognises that the researcher is fundamentally a part of the process. As Amit (2000, p2) explains, “one of the peculiarities of participant observation as ethnographic fieldwork is the way in which the researcher and his/ her personal relationships serve as the primary vehicles for eliciting findings and insight.” The thesis is always going to be the researcher's interpretation of a researchable phenomenon; phenomenology broadly does not have a problem with this. However, it does follow that it is necessary to be aware of yourself as a researcher, and to be aware of how others see you. Also it is necessary to be aware of when one is a part of the process, and when one is reflecting on the process as a researcher.

First a summary is given of the key timings in the progression of the research. The first interviews were conducted in December 1998 for the Open University case study before the agreement was reached with Post Office Consulting to provide research access. This was secured in April 1999, during which time the research focus was further refined and more scoping interviews were conducted with key informants. First entry into Post Office Consulting as a member of the Knowledge Management Practitioner Group was in June 1999. This enabled a level of participation in group meetings and access to other initiatives broadly related to Post Office Consulting's vision of becoming a 'knowledge organisation.' The AKAP opportunity arose in the same month and the first AKAP Brainstorm Meeting was conducted in July. The AKAP project team first met in September 1999 and twice subsequently, conducting a considerable amount of work on the scoping of the Project, before it reached full initiation in October. The AKAP project formally ran for 7 months before formal closure at the end of May 2000. This coincided with pulling out of regular involvement with the KM Practitioner Group, although a few remaining interviews were conducted up until September 2000. In total the length of involvement with Post Office Consulting in fieldwork terms was over a period of a 18 months, although the most concentrated period was the 9 months of participation in the Argentina Knowledge Capture Project.

There were therefore two levels of participation in Post Office Consulting which will be discussed in turn;

- becoming a member of the Knowledge Management Practitioner Group - this came first and led to;
- becoming a member of the Argentina Knowledge Capture Project team.

4.3.1 Membership of the Knowledge Management Practitioner Group

The initial participation in Post Office Consulting came through the temporary membership of the Knowledge Management Practitioner Group. The KM Practitioner Group was introduced in Chapter 3. This was the formal Group set up to bring together the range of knowledge management tools and initiatives designed to become the way of working for a 'knowledge organisation.' These were also developed for sale as Post Office Consulting's knowledge management 'tool kit' in the internal Post Office market.

The invitation to join the Practitioner Group came about as a result of previous involvement with Post Office Consulting over the production of a case-study for the Open University on the MBA course in Managing Knowledge. Four interviews were conducted at this initial stage with informants who are characterised later in the thesis as Post Office Consulting's key KM 'thinkers and shapers.' These were the Director and General Manager, Malcolm Hart; the Knowledge Director, Bob Field; the Knowledge Core Process Manager, Paul Butcher; and one other member of the KM Practitioner Group, Tim Bray, who had been closely involved with the discussions and the formation of Post Office Consulting's overall approach to knowledge management.

Tim was instrumental in gaining research access to the Practitioner Group with the assent of the others. He was also responsible for agreeing with the Practitioner Group Leader, Patricia Dalrymple, and the Professional Head, Philip Connelly, that membership of the Group would be given for the period of research. It was agreed that membership of the Group would be as what is called a 'Location Independent Worker.'³ All of these people can be thought of as key gatekeepers in terms of negotiating and allowing access to the organisation. However it was important, when entering the Practitioner Group, not to appear to other members of the Group

³ There are many people in the KM Practitioner Group who work like this; they are predominantly home-based and are provided with computers and phones to facilitate their work away from the 'physical' organisation.

that this was through their direct patronage. It was important to be viewed independently and gain people's trust as one of the 'workers' rather than a member of this elite group.

The Knowledge Management Practitioner Group were open and used to this type of activity and to hosting people from outside: There was one other PhD student from Queen's University Belfast who was also a member of the Practitioner Group and conducted part of her research in Post Office Consulting. The Group is the standing host to a sandwich student from the Business Studies programme at the University of Westminster - one of these students participated in AKAP. The Group also had a link with Bournemouth University.

Membership of the KM Practitioner Group was important because it allowed a fundamental level of access to the organisation as an insider, that is, as a member of the organisation who can legitimately gain access to other members and parts of the organisation. Becoming an 'employee' of the organisation also gives perhaps the most important level of access - access to the organisation's information systems, particularly email communications, and electronic databases including contact directories. In the Post Office, this is all managed through the Lotus Notes platform, which was accessed remotely using the lap top computer provided as a Location Independent Worker. The Notes platform accounted for a significant part of the work which was participated in. This meant hundreds of electronic communications via direct email and team working software. All of these were potential data sources, and in the end accounted for a significant part of the data analysed.

Membership of the Knowledge Management Practitioner Group allowed the research to focus on proponents and practitioners of Knowledge Management. This was in order to find out more about what Post Office Consulting is doing under the umbrella of KM, and what they understand themselves and the organisation to be doing about knowledge management. This provided a lot of the background context to the case-study organisation, its broader vision as a 'knowledge organisation,' the approach taken, the initiatives underway, and the key discourses

underpinning this activity. It also allowed the research to look at various knowledge management tools and initiatives linked to the Practitioner Group - for example, the Knowledge Interviews project, the After Action Review initiative, the Singapore Post Knowledge Management Project – in order to develop ways of grounding the research. This ultimately came as participation in AKAP, which arose directly through membership of the Practitioner Group. Early membership of the Practitioner Group was therefore a significant part of the focusing process.

Apart from AKAP, actual involvement in other work in the Practitioner Group was limited. In practice, involvement with many members of the Practitioner Group was through interviews for the research. However, the Knowledge Management Practitioner Group did hold regular monthly meetings, 6 of which were attended during the course of the fieldwork. Part of these meetings often required group exercises involving participation.

Other key meetings attended which were observed for the purposes of research were as follows. Not all of the meetings attended are listed, as some of these did not contribute much to the research.

- Knowledge Process Network meeting on 27.7.99 - this group was formed of Professional Heads from all of Post Office Consulting's Practitioner Groups. Their role is to act as the steering group for Post Office Consulting's 'Knowledge core process' and to manage the Knowledge Programme. These were introduced in the previous chapter as key aspects of Post Office Consulting's approach to the management of knowledge. The meeting of the network was therefore a good opportunity to see the diversity of Practitioner Groups represented and the types of discussions being held.
- Singapore Post Workshop - this was organised by the manager of the Singapore Post Knowledge Management Project as an opportunity for British Post Office consultants who had been working for Singapore Post to share their knowledge of building a state of the art

mail centre. It was attended by approximately 100 managers, predominantly from Post Office Consulting, and provoked considerable interest and discussion from the audience.

- Participation in the Knowledge Interviews workshop 12-13 July 1999 - this was a two day workshop of training to become a Knowledge Interviewer, run by Philip Connelly and Teresa Singer from the Post Office Consulting KM Practitioner Group.

4.3.2 The Argentina Knowledge Capture Project (AKAP)

The Argentina Knowledge Capture project - or AKAP - became a major empirical locus for the research. This was because of the centrality of this project to the research aims and objectives, and also because of its suitability in timing for the fieldwork period. The opportunity to participate in this project came through the Knowledge Management Practitioner Group Leader, Patricia Dalrymple. Patricia had been involved in agreeing research access to the Practitioner Group, and was involved in exploratory interviews early in the fieldwork period. At this opportunity, interest was expressed to her about getting involved in a project, in order to facilitate participation in the work of the Practitioner Group.

It is a matter of great fortune that around this time - June 1999 - the Knowledge Director of Post Office Consulting had been talking to Patricia about managing a Knowledge Management project which he wanted to fund; the project would be an opportunity to test out Post Office Consulting's newly developed knowledge management tools, by capturing knowledge from consultants working on a major postal consultancy contract in Argentina and 'deploying' the knowledge back in the Post Office in the UK. When Patricia agreed to take on the project as Project Manager, she assembled a project team initially of four from predominantly within the KM Practitioner Group. The researcher was included in the AKAP Project Team, and appears in the analytical chapters as Andrew Church.

The other AKAP Project Team members from the KM Practitioner Group were; Simon Mann, who had recently joined the Practitioner Group and was given AKAP as his first project; and Polly Johnson, who had been in the Practitioner Group for a year, but as editor of the Post Office Consulting newsletter, and she wanted to develop her work in the area of Knowledge Management. One member of the AKAP project team, Val Kennedy, came from another organisation in the Post Office - Post Office Research Group. Her involvement with AKAP was principally to do with the development of Knowledge Visualisation software which will be discussed in the following chapter.

Responsibility for the sub-elements of the project was divided roughly equally between these 4 core members of the project team. AKAP was managed using the PRINCE⁴ project management methodology. This requires the project to be sub-divided into constituent elements known as 'Products,' each of which has a 'Product Manager.' The products were divided up fairly equally and democratically among the team members, with Andrew Church assuming responsibility for the following products. A fuller description of these is given in the following chapter which describes the AKAP project process and participants in more detail. However a brief description of what was involved in 'managing' the products is given here;

- **the Knowledge Interviews product**

This involved co-ordinating the programme of Knowledge Interviews for AKAP, securing the involvement of both Interviewers and Interviewees, briefing the Interviewers and liaising with them over the production of the outputs from the Knowledge Interviews they conducted. 10 Knowledge Interviews were conducted for AKAP, employing the services of 8 different Interviewers.

⁴ PRINCE is an acronym for Projects in Controlled Environments

- **the Shorter Interviews product**

This was similar to co-ordinating the Knowledge Interviews product. 6 Shorter Interviews were conducted predominantly by members of the AKAP project team.

- **the Tools Evaluation Report**

This was a report examining the tools used to capture and deploy knowledge. It was delivered as an objective of AKAP to see how Post Office Consulting's knowledge management tools stand up to use in a live project setting. These were predominantly the Knowledge Interviews and Shorter Interviews described above, as well as the AKAP Electronic Filing Cabinet and the Knowledge Visualisation Products managed by Val Kennedy. The report was therefore written by Andrew Church - who had principle contact with the AKAP Knowledge Interviewers and Interviewees, and was therefore best placed to reflect on how the process had gone - and Val, whose had been closely involved with developing the Electronic Filing Cabinet and the Knowledge Visualisation software. Writing the report also gave Andrew the opportunity to conduct feedback interviews with most of the interviewers and interviewees who had participated in AKAP. Although the interviews were conducted from the AKAP perspective, the results contributed to the data analysis.

In addition to these 'product' responsibilities from within the team, Andrew also conducted 2 Knowledge Interviews for the AKAP project, and one Shorter Interview. These all represented a formal level of responsibility to the project. However, membership of a team also involved a level of group participation and interaction which was not written into the project plan. This involved participation in AKAP team meetings, usually at or near the Post Office Consulting offices at Old Street in London. There were 16 AKAP-related meetings in total, which were;

- Initial brainstorm meeting 29.7.99, London
- Team meeting 2.9.99, London
- Team meeting 5.10.99, London

- Team meeting (pre-PIM) 27.10.99, London
- Project Initiation Meeting (PIM) 27.10.99, London
- Team meeting 1.12.99, London
- Team meeting 6.1.00, Brunel University
- 1st AKAP Analysis Meeting 8.2.00, Milton Keynes
- AKAP pre-Board and post-Board team meetings, 10.2.00, London
- AKAP End of Stage 2 Board Meeting 10.2.00, London
- Team meeting 6.3.00, Chesterfield
- 2nd AKAP Analysis Meeting 7.3.00, Chesterfield
- Team meeting 24.3.00, London
- Team meeting 5.5.00, London
- AKAP Project Completion Meeting (with Project Board) 23.5.00, London
- AKAP Project Evaluation Meeting (Project Team) 26.5.00, Broadway

NB: The specific terminology relating to PRINCE (project management) is explained in the following chapter. The objective here is simply to indicate the scope of participation in the project.

The Project Team also had a considerable and regular level of interaction using electronic communications. Communications with other team members occurred at least weekly during much of the project period, and during the busiest periods on a daily basis. It was therefore necessary to ‘Ras-in’⁵ every day in order to check electronic correspondence. Early in the project team members communicated by email using Lotus Notes, but soon after the project started, the team voluntarily switched to the use of ‘virtual’ team working software called TeamWeb.⁶ This Lotus Notes-based platform enabled the group to centralise discussions and decisions which were being made in the various aspects of the project, thus enabling all team

⁵ This is the Post Office jargon used for connecting to the Post Office network via modem

⁶ Developed by Team Performance Ltd.

members to be involved if they wished. The TeamWeb was structured according to AKAP Products. Thus the Product Manager would be regularly contributing to the TeamWeb discussion around that product, asking the other team members for advice etc. All team members were active users of TeamWeb, and to this extent, all the team members found it a helpful tool.⁷ Some communications with the field were conducted via phone,⁸ although these were far fewer than those conducted electronically.

As Jorgensen (1989, p.16) explains, the idea behind participation is to minimise the disruption which the researcher's presence may bring. Participation is a way of becoming an insider, thus enabling the researcher to make 'unobtrusive' observations. This potential disruption was effectively minimised by becoming equally involved in the work of the AKAP project team, taking on similar project-related responsibilities as the other members, contributing to discussions, and offering advice where it was sought. The role played within the project team was as a project team member, not as a PhD researcher. However, no attempt was made to hide the use of AKAP as a case-study; indeed, the team members all participated in interviews for the PhD research. Patricia, Polly and Simon all stressed in these interviews that they treated me first and foremost as an AKAP team member, with the research in the background. They were not fully aware of the extent to which AKAP featured as a part of the empirical research. Indeed, Polly did not realise until late on in the project (in March) that this was not a paid role within the project team. When she found out, she was "absolutely gob-smacked ... I couldn't believe it."⁹

When participating in team meetings, disruption was minimised by not behaving forcefully or becoming dominant in the discussions. The view of the consensus was followed, and where possible, an impartial view was maintained over what was happening in the process. This became difficult at times, for example, at the 1st Analysis Meeting, where there was personal

⁷ This came out in interviews with them.

⁸ I was provided with a mobile phone for the purpose of working on the project in this 'virtual' mode.

⁹ Polly Johnson interview 16.3.00 count 1/B 200

disagreement over the approach taken to the process which could not be voiced. When participating as a Product Manager for the AKAP Knowledge Interviews and Shorter Interviews products, the practitioners were left to use the technique as they understood it from their training, rather than the AKAP team prescribing what should out of the process. The aim was to have minimum interference with how the technique was applied and allow the Interviewers to interpret it in their own way.

The issue about whether to conduct research covertly or overtly is a particular ethical issue in conducting participant observation, discussed by Whyte (1984), Easterby-Smith et al (1991) and Gill and Johnson (1997). In terms of ‘coming clean’ over the PhD research or whether to approach people as an AKAP team member, these decisions were made on the basis of what it was felt would be best for the data. For example, the AKAP Knowledge Interviewees were mostly all interviewed as an AKAP team member seeking feedback for the Tools Evaluation Report, rather than as a PhD researcher. Not only did this provide a cover for contacting them, it was also felt that they were more likely to participate if approached from this angle. The perspective on the interview did not affect its usability in the analysis.

However, there were some examples where the best strategy may not have been chosen. For example, in an interview with one of the key stakeholders in the AKAP project, the standpoint of PhD researcher may have given a more neutral message than as a representative of Post Office Consulting. This respondent belonged to one of Post Office Consulting’s rival organisations within the Post Office Group, and thus her behaviour towards a member of Post Office Consulting appeared to make her guarded in what she was prepared to say. However, this must remain conjecture, as the decisions were taken soundly and in all cases usable data emerged.

The point of these examples is to observe the need to be aware of when one is inside the box as a participant or outside the box as a researcher, and to appreciate the effect that this may have on the nature of the data collected.

4.4 Data collection methods

The data were collected via interviews, observations and the use of secondary sources.

4.4.1 Interviews

The use of interviews as a method of gathering data is the bedrock of many forms of qualitative research. Most of the authors quoted in this chapter mention the importance of interviewing in its various forms. Interviews were used early on in the research as a way of becoming informed of the broader organisational context, and in order to focus the line of enquiry. The themes of Post Office Consulting's vision of becoming a 'knowledge organisation' and their espoused practice of knowledge management both provided a good route into the interviews with early informants. Earlier interviews therefore tended to be fairly open and unstructured. Interviews became more structured as the fieldwork progressed and the themes of the research became more focused.

When it came to the Argentina Knowledge Capture Project, as well as participating in the process and observing what other participants are doing and saying, it was also useful to give participants the opportunity to express themselves in an interview situation. The interview forum allows them to respond to specific questions about their involvement and understanding of the process, and gives them time to develop their response. It was generally found that people were willing to be interviewed: No one refused to take part in an interview, although some interviews did not transpire due to force of circumstances.

A total of 45 interviews were conducted with 34 interviewees. 24 interviewees were interviewed once, 9 were interviewed twice and one was interviewed three times. Of these 34 interviewees, 27 had some involvement with AKAP. Of the 45 interviews conducted, 27 were related to the AKAP project, although not exclusively. 15 of the interviews were conducted from the perspective of an AKAP team member, either as an AKAP interview, or feedback interview with Knowledge Interviewers and Interviewees. The other 30 interviews were all conducted from the perspective of a PhD researcher.

Interviews were conducted mostly face to face and were recorded, although some were conducted by telephone and either recorded or notes taken. Interviews were then either transcribed from the recording, or notes were made directly from the recording. The earlier interviews were transcribed, because in the early stages when the research was less focused, there was a tendency to feel that nothing should be lost. The later interviews were listened to from the recording and notes taken directly from listening. This became possible as the research progressed, and there was a clearer focus to the interviews.

4.4.2 Observations

As the methodology of participant observation suggests, a major method of data collection was to make observations around the processes - not just what the participants are doing and how they interact with each other, but also the contextual and environmental factors in which they are operating and how those might affect the process.

For example, at the meetings participated in as part of the AKAP project, there were two levels of note taking - from the perspective of participant, where notes would relate to the task-oriented nature of the meeting - and from the perspective of researcher, where observations would be made around the characteristics of the process, for example;

- who is talking, who isn't - are some people dominating?
- who is interacting with who?
- body language?
- what is the room like - do people like it or feel constrained by it?

These observations were typically written into a fieldwork journal, and also verbal observations and reflections were made after meetings using a Dictaphone. As mentioned earlier, an aim of participant observation is to minimise disruption to the research field. There were occasions when it would have been useful to tape record, or perhaps even video record meetings in order to have a clear visual record of what happened. This would have been particularly useful in the AKAP Analysis Meetings, for example. However, it was felt that this might overtly affect behaviour in the meeting if participants were aware that what they said was being recorded and noted. It was therefore decided that relatively unobtrusive note-taking was preferable. Other participants did notice that many notes were taken at meetings, but this did not appear to cause any disruption or visible change in people's behaviour.

There were also observations arising from another predominant form of interaction between participants, and this was the use of email and other electronic communications. Indeed, the quantity of electronic material stored was considerable, and the level of insight to be gained around the relationships between people astonishing.

4.4.3 Secondary sources

There were some useful secondary sources to be gained from participation in the organisation, such as newsletters (e.g. Post Office Consulting News) written communications (e.g. messages from the Chairman), project documentation, company grey literature, and business plans (e.g. KM Practitioner Group business plan).

In AKAP there were important secondary sources in the form of Knowledge Interviews and other interviews conducted as part of the AKAP project.

4.5 Data analysis

“Research goes beyond description and requires analysis. It looks for explanations, relationships, comparisons, predictions, generalizations and theories. These are the why questions.” (Phillips and Pugh, 1994; p.47)

Books on research methods and methodologies are curiously scant on how to go about data analysis, yet this is arguably a more important part of the overall research design. Yin (1994) believes that it is important to have a sense of how the data will be analysed before they are collected. There seems to be plenty of advice on the different models for conducting research, but when it comes to dealing with the data collected, this may be left to the final few pages of research methods books. For example, Jorgensen’s (1989) 125-page book on participant observation has 10 pages towards the end on ‘analyzing and theorizing,’ which is confined to general comments about the nature of theory, but has few practical tips on how to go about it. Yin’s (1994) book on case-study research has a similarly meagre proportion devoted to ‘analyzing case-study evidence.’ However, Yin does recognise that this is an underdeveloped area of the case-study methodology and attempts to redress this gap.

Part of the problem over giving advice on analysing qualitative data is that it is difficult to be prescriptive given the wide variation in types of phenomena for study and the nature of evidence which is used to support the research. Miles and Huberman (1994) have clearly made an effort to bring ‘scientific’ rigour to qualitative data analysis and have devoted an entire book to the subject. However, it is difficult to abstract their prescription for a particular analysis technique from the data in which it is situated, or to conceive of how it might apply to the analysis of your

own data. It seems that 'labelled' prescriptions for qualitative data analysis only really start to have meaning once the analysis process has begun.

Nevertheless, Miles and Huberman's approach of using conceptual frameworks, theoretical propositions and research questions to guide the data analysis was closer to how the data analysis was conducted than a completely bottom-up approach advocated by Corbin and Strauss (1990).

It is not claimed here that any of these books were used prescriptively before the analysis commenced. Rather, they were able to offer an explanation of the analysis strategy used once it was already underway. To this end, Yin's approach of 'explanation-building' (1994, p.110) is resonant with the approach taken to analysis in this research. The underlying phenomenological approach taken to this thesis has meant that the analysis has been driven by induction from the data. There have been a number of iterations involved in developing the overall focus and structure of the thesis, which form an essential part of the analytical process.

In order to analyse the data, the research adopted a framework for viewing knowledge codification at different levels of social interaction in an organisational context. These levels are individual, formal group, organisation, and informal group levels of knowledge codification. This framework was adopted because the research aims to examine processes of knowledge codification in the organisation, who is involved, and what characterises the nature of their interaction. Analysis of data according to the levels framework makes this possible. This framework also provides the headings for the analytical chapters.

4.6 Boundaries and limitations of the data

Any research in the social sciences is highly context-specific. It is difficult to reproduce the research or replicate the results when so many changes in context will have occurred, not least, a

change of researcher. In this case, Post Office Consulting and AKAP provided a fieldwork context which makes the research unique. Unlike the positivist tradition where the objective is to produce research which can be replicated, there are clear limitations to replicating research using this methodology (Hammersley, 1998 p.62). However, this does not invalidate the research, it is just important to recognise the context-specificity of the thesis and identify which findings are the generalisable aspects of the phenomenon under investigation.

Yin (1994, p.10) says that “case studies, like experiments are generalizable to theoretical propositions and not to populations or universes.” The aim of this study therefore was not to produce findings about knowledge management which are generalisable to all instances of knowledge management, or all organisations putting knowledge management principles and practices into action. Codification is only one strategy, albeit a popular one, for setting about managing knowledge. There are different approaches to knowledge management which were highlighted in the literature review chapter. The thesis focused on the codification aspects of the processes participated in and observed. The research set out with some theoretical propositions about knowledge codification which guided the process of enquiry.

In order to conduct research into knowledge management practices on the ground, the data gathering was focused on people and phenomena explicitly linked with knowledge management. It is recognised that knowledge management practices are not necessarily explicitly labelled in this way. However, the KM label was a useful device for bounding the research. Similarly with the concept of codification, the research focused on managed instances of knowledge codification, however it was recognised that codification processes happen organically irrespective of management. This latter aspect was not researched.

There was a strong learning objective to the Argentina Knowledge Capture Project. However the research did not set out to research learning, and it is therefore not possible to examine the learning of participants in the process. The realisation that codification plays an obvious role in

how we learn came late on in the research process. This realisation came from researching and codifying this thesis - which is clearly a learning process - and from participating in processes where the codification of knowledge was the vehicle for learning, such as in the participation of AKAP Knowledge Interviewers. Participants clearly did learn, as they talked positively about their experience of being involved in AKAP. However, research about learning would involve going beyond just asking people what they learned, and this was not a part of the methodology.

Finally, in terms of the physicality of the research environment, there was little sense of the organisation as a 'place'. That a large part of the participation occurred 'virtually' raises interesting questions about what constitutes the 'field' (Norman, 2000). This is not so much a limitation, more a comment on where the research can take place given the nature of the processes under investigation. It is a particularly recent phenomenon emerging from the use of ICTs, wherein text-based asynchronous communication acts as research data. Thus in AKAP the use of email, electronic databases and 'virtual' team working software has opened up the possibilities for conducting research using the method of participant observation.

The following chapter will now go on to describe in more detail what happened in the Argentina Knowledge Capture Project and who was involved.

CHAPTER 5: THE ARGENTINA KNOWLEDGE CAPTURE PROJECT: CASES OF KNOWLEDGE CODIFICATION

5.1 Introduction

The objectives of this chapter are:

- to describe the main empirical ‘location’ of the research - the Argentina Knowledge Capture Project - and introduce the key participants and their relationships
- to show how the empirical data can be segmented as forms and processes of knowledge codification
- to build up a framework for the subsequent analytical chapters of the thesis

The Argentina Knowledge Capture Project - or AKAP as it was known to those who participated in it - came together for nine months between 1999 and 2000, tasked with the objective to ‘capture and deploy’ the knowledge of British Post Office consultants working on a major postal consultancy project in Argentina. Although funded predominantly within the section of the Post Office known as Post Office Consulting, AKAP brought together stakeholders representing two other organisations within the Post Office Group - British Postal Consultancy Services (BPCS) and Post Office Research Group (PORG).

This chapter describes the Argentina Knowledge Capture Project. It is a broad overview, covering issues such as what the project aimed to achieve, what the project actually achieved, what was the model of management used and what approaches were taken to ‘capturing’ and ‘deploying’ knowledge. Most importantly the chapter introduces who was involved in the process. As the thesis examines knowledge codification as a *process*, a major objective of this

chapter is to introduce the key participants and stakeholders in AKAP. This chapter therefore starts to consider their relationships and the nature of their interaction in this knowledge management context. It shows that a number of different interests are represented by the stakeholders, and that different groups, both formal and informal, and organisations are represented.

Having given an overview of what happened in AKAP, the chapter then goes on to examine what processes of knowledge codification emerged and were observed during the research. This is the beginning of the analytical treatment of the data collected. The chapter shows that codification is not a term which the participants used in relation to their activity - their preferred term was knowledge 'capture.' However, the thesis interprets what they are doing in terms of knowledge 'codification' as it was conceived in the discussion and development of the concept made in Chapters 1 and 2.

The chapter therefore shows how the management activity occurring around the project can be segmented into a range of knowledge codification forms and processes. Data were collected on all of these forms and processes in the course of participation in the AKAP project and within Post Office Consulting more generally. In AKAP, knowledge codification can be viewed from both a product perspective - in terms of what the project delivered as 'packaged' knowledge - and a process perspective - in terms of the knowledge codification processes which were involved in their construction.

The chapter then goes on to build up a framework to analyse the processes in greater depth. The forms and processes of knowledge codification identified through participation and observation in the research field are presented in a table. This table applies three simple questions to each case of knowledge codification;

- who is doing the codifying?
- whose knowledge is being codified?
- who is the knowledge being codified for?

From this process it can be seen that the cases of knowledge codification occur within different forms of social interaction. This is a simple framework of 'levels' in the organisation.

Knowledge codification can be viewed occurring;

- at an individual and individual-to-individual level
- in formal groups
- at the organisational level
- in informal groups or 'communities of practice'

It is important to note that it is not the aim of this framework to consider whether groups or organisations *have* knowledge. The framework is simply used to show that knowledge codification occurs in these different contexts of interaction. It is also an important focusing tool: As the cases of knowledge codification identified are too numerous for them all to be analysed, the framework is used to select certain of the knowledge codification cases for in-depth analytical treatment. This chapter thus builds the foundation for the subsequent analytical chapters 6 to 9.

This chapter first goes on to give the background context to the Argentina Knowledge Capture Project.

5.2 The Argentina Consultancy Project and the potential for knowledge management

Although limited in its ability to offer consultancy services on the open market in the UK,¹ the British Post Office is allowed to place tenders for consultancy in the postal administrations of other countries. These contracts are negotiated and managed by the Post Office's overseas consultancy wing known as British Postal Consultancy Services, or BPCS. BPCS is a small organisation of no more than 20 managers and administrators located in the Post Office's International Services division, and depends heavily on sourcing the manpower for these international projects from within Post Office Consulting. Post Office Consulting, as it has been shown in Chapter 3, is a somewhat larger organisation of about 1300 people, which works for clients within the 'internal market' of the Post Office. Occasionally the opportunity arises for Post Office Consulting consultants, and other managers working within Royal Mail's regional divisions, to be sub-contracted by BPCS to work overseas.

The opportunity for consultancy in Argentina arose when the Argentinean government privatised and deregulated its Post Office - the *Correo* - and a contractual requirement of the transfer of ownership was that a team of postal consultants from the international market was brought in to help manage the transition. Their expertise would assist the *Correo*'s new management team in turning around its financial performance by effecting a complete overhaul of a neglected postal system. This was to be broad-brush consultancy covering all areas of postal expertise. The UK bid was unexpectedly successful,² and in the summer of 1997 a Programme Director was appointed to manage the Argentina Consultancy Project, and an interim team from the British Post Office was quickly despatched to Buenos Aires to scope up the detail of a consultancy programme set to run for a minimum of 5 years.

¹ This is a statutory limitation stipulated by the Post Office Act

² Interview with Director and General Manager of Post Office Consulting , 7.9.00

Unused to this type and size of contract and the numbers of consultants involved, a relatively unprepared management team on the UK-side hastily set about appointing a team of long-term resident consultants, defining the terms of their employment contracts, rushing through an induction programme and despatching them at short notice - in many cases with their families - to start work as quickly as possible. An absence of established systems and mechanisms for dealing with these expatriates not only reflected the urgency to get the consultancy project rolling, but also reflected a Post Office relatively inexperienced in managing a large number of expatriates abroad. The long-term consultants in the early stages of the contract comprised a core team of 11 residents, although upwards of 40 consultants from the British Post Office worked out in Argentina on short-term assignments, and a further 10 or so UK-based staff have also worked on the project at its various stages in a support capacity. Compared to previous overseas consultancy contracts managed by BPCS, this project was on an entirely new scale.

Despite the tremendous potential of this opportunity for the consultants concerned, the Argentina Consultancy Project from the British perspective also presented many difficulties. Due to a complete change in the Argentina management team between the bid for the contract and the start of the consultancy assignment, the work which the British team ended up doing in many cases was very different from what they had expected to be doing. Whereas the original expectation had been that the British team would operate in an advisory capacity, the decision was taken by the Argentina side's new Directors to move the British consultants into the line - that is, effectively to work from within the Argentina Post's management structure. This created some tensions between both sides over who was setting the work agenda, resulting in frustrated work programmes with a limited sense of what tangible deliverables some consultants were managing to achieve. For many of the consultants this was a stressful time, compounded by cultural differences in working practices, lack of a sufficient operational knowledge of the language, and a perceived lack of support from an over-stretched team back in the UK. There was ultimately tension within the British consultancy team itself, with its directors becoming the focus of an increasingly disgruntled project team. By mid 1999, the size of the British

consultancy team in Argentina had been dramatically reduced. While two consultants had had their contracts terminated early by the client, others had taken the decision to leave Argentina before their contracts had come to an end.

Although there were some notable success stories in what the British were managing to achieve,³ some felt that the Argentineans considered them a drain on their stretched resources, while the *Correo* had a more immediate need to turn round its huge operating losses. In 2000 the terms of the remaining two-year contract between the British and the Argentina Post Office's were re-negotiated. By May 2000, there was a somewhat smaller team of three British Post Office consultants, none of whom were part of the original resident team.

At the outset there appeared to be no real strategic objective behind the bid for the Argentina consultancy project, although this was clearly a lucrative contract.⁴ In time it became apparent to senior managers in Post Office International Services that this was giving the UK a toe-hold in South America, and in terms of what the British side could learn from the experience, the Argentina consultancy project represented something of a hot potato: Here was the first fully privatised Post Office in the world, with open competition and a regulator in place, and working within it were consultants from the British Post Office who were experiencing first-hand the transition from public to private ownership and a fully deregulated domestic postal market. With the pace of European deregulation quickening, the curtailment of the British Post Office's domestic monopoly looming, and greater freedom for a future Consignia PLC to compete in a globalising market for mergers, acquisitions and joint-ventures, the significance of the Argentina project - in terms of the knowledge to be gained from the experience - was not lost on International Services. Here was an emerging basis on which to rationalise an international strategy - the opportunity for the business to learn from its experience overseas and to use that

³ For example, the team managed to build from scratch a new Mail Processing Centre in Buenos Aires in just 14 months - a project which would take a minimum of 2 years in the UK

⁴ Comments by Chris Arthur - Programme Director of Argentina Consultancy Project - at AKAP Brainstorm Meeting 28.7.99 and interview 29.9.00

knowledge continually to inform international strategy as the business develops its role within a global market place. Picking up on this potential, British Postal Consultancy Services has been keen to develop a role of 'leveraging' knowledge from international projects back into the business, and has begun to look at mechanisms and approaches by which it can fulfil this role.⁵

In Argentina, the Programme Director of the Consultancy Project - Chris Arthur - had already realised that mechanisms for capitalising on the knowledge which his consultants were gaining was lacking in the project organisation. To this end he had asked his consultants on an ongoing basis to start producing 'Knowledge Reports', highlighting the key aspects of their work in Argentina and what they had learned in the process. However, there were no systems for storing and accessing the wealth of documentation produced in the course of their work. Mindful of the large numbers of consultants likely to come in and out of the project, Chris' immediate concern was to create a central repository of key documentation which could inform consultants of what work had already been done.⁶ Here was a fairly prosaic need for knowledge management, driven more by the operational effectiveness of the consultants in their daily work, than by the strategic value of their knowledge to the business as a whole.

Dealing with the complexity of this documentation and providing sophisticated access points to it would be problematic. Having recently read about a software-based technique for knowledge modelling under development at Post Office Research Group,⁷ Chris contacted Val Kennedy at Research Group who had written the article, to find out whether the technique - known as Knowledge Visualisation - could be used to model and provide access to the documentation. Research Group welcomed the opportunity: At last they had located a substantial document set on which to trial the Knowledge Visualisation software.

⁵ Comments by Cynthia Houston at meeting 19.1.00. This meeting in fact, was the Pre-Interview for Knowledge Interview with Andrew Church. Notes were written up as an output for AKAP.

⁶ Chris Arthur interview 29.9.00

⁷ *Futures News*, Reach out and touch the world of data by Val Kennedy, Post Office Research Group

5.3 Enter AKAP - the Argentina Knowledge Capture Project

Quite independent of these discussions between the Programme Director of the Argentina Consultancy Project and Post Office Research Group, the Knowledge Director of Post Office Consulting - Bob Field - had his own reasons for funding work into the practice of knowledge management. Notwithstanding the strategic potential of knowledge to be gained from Argentina, this was not the primary impetus behind the Argentina Knowledge Capture Project (AKAP).

AKAP arose first and foremost as an opportunity to put into practice the knowledge management tools developed within Post Office Consulting's Knowledge Programme. While some of the tools - particularly the Knowledge Interview - had been through the trial and development stage, there was a distinct need to see how practical application of Post Office Consulting's KM tools would stand up to rigorous use in a live setting. As a former Project Manager on Railnet, a multi-million pound project to develop a postal rail network in the UK, Bob passionately believed that knowledge management of the project had been poor, and he was determined that such poor project management could not be allowed to continue.⁸

With such a direct interest in the ability to effect learning between projects, Bob had 'selfish' reasons as Post Office Consulting's Knowledge Director to fund AKAP himself rather than direct funding for the project through the Knowledge Programme.⁹ He had previously funded the Singapore Post Knowledge Management project, which was a much smaller affair, but which was also set up to fund the use of Post Office Consulting's newly developed knowledge management tools. The knowledge gained by British Post Office consultants working on the building of a state-of-the-art International Mail Centre for Singapore Post, was seen to be directly transferable to the British Post Office's own planned international mail facility at

⁸ Bob Field interviews 11.12.98 and 5.11.99

⁹ Bob Field comments at AKAP Brainstorm Meeting, 28.7.99 (p.49 of fieldwork journal) and Paul Butcher interview 3.8.00

Heathrow airport. This was the justification given for engaging the Singapore Post Knowledge Management project.¹⁰ Although the strategic value of the knowledge to be gained from Argentina was not the principle reason why the Knowledge Director funded AKAP, it was nevertheless used as the rationale. As Bob suggested, the capture of knowledge should not occur in a vacuum - "you have to work out where it is going to be re-used in order to build a business case."¹¹

Val Kennedy had, in the meantime been discussing with Tim Bray, from Post Office Consulting's KM Consultancy, possible opportunities for Post Office Research Group (PORG) and Post Office Consulting to do some work together, particularly with their joint interest in Knowledge Management.¹² Realising that Post Office Consulting were going to fund a project on knowledge management for Argentina, Val saw the opportunity to join in with the project, contributing the Knowledge Visualisation technique as a method of dealing with the huge amount of documentation which was anticipated. This had been the substance of her earlier discussions with Chris Arthur, the Programme Director in Argentina. Joining in with Post Office Consulting's project would also put weight behind Val's bid to PORG's Innovation Fund for funding on development of the Knowledge Visualisation technique. The bid was successful, and the Innovation Fund contributed around £10,000 to the £60,000 which Bob Field was prepared to commit.¹³

Bob had already asked Patricia Dalrymple, the Practitioner Group leader of Post Office Consulting's Knowledge Management Consultancy, whether she would like to take on the management of his proposed project for knowledge management in Argentina. Patricia at first had been unsure.¹⁴ She already had a heavy workload, and there was a serious question over

¹⁰ Malcolm Hart, 'Waving the Magic Wand,' *Whitespace* (Post Office's 'Management network review') August 1999 pp 5-7

¹¹ Comment by Bob Field at AKAP Brainstorm Meeting 28.7.99 (p.49 of fieldwork journal)

¹² Telephone conversation with Val Kennedy 29.3.01

¹³ Bob Field interview 5.11.99 p.20 of transcript

¹⁴ Patricia Dalrymple interview 10.6.99

whether she would be able to balance her commitments. Nevertheless Bob and she had worked together on Railnet, and Patricia felt that she had earned a good reputation as a Project Manager, particularly in her early rise as a newcomer and Communications specialist in the organisation. Here was an opportunity for her to demonstrate her project management skills in a knowledge management context. However, she was not going to take any nonsense, and Patricia was well aware of ‘politics’ existing between Post Office Consulting and BPCS. In her view, a good Project Manager’s reputation is built on delivering on time and to cost, and ‘political bullshit’ does not get in the way.¹⁵

While these discussions had been going on in Post Office Consulting, Chris Arthur in Argentina had been looking forward to collaborating with Val Kennedy over the ‘visualisation’ of the hundreds of project documents and reports he was collecting. He was surprised when “all of a sudden, Post Office Consulting popped up.” Chris was “deeply suspicious” of Post Office Consulting’s act of funding AKAP even though he felt he was the one who initiated it.¹⁶ Chris used to work for Post Office Consulting, but he believes that due to an earlier fall-out between him and a close associate of the Director and General Manager, there was considerable resistance high up in Post Office Consulting to Chris’s appointment as head of the Argentina Consultancy Project. He believes this led to him being appointed to the Argentina job through Post Office International Services, unlike the other consultants on the project who were all appointed to their positions as Post Office Consulting employees.¹⁷ Chris was concerned that this was an audit which would enable Post Office Consulting to build a case against him or BPCS.¹⁸

The backdrop to this comment is an historical mutual tension between British Postal Consultancy Services and Post Office Consulting as competing consultancy organisations

¹⁵ Comments at interview 27.4.00 (count 1/B 100) and after End of Stage 2 Board Meeting 10.2.00 (notes p.127 of fieldwork journal).

¹⁶ Chris Arthur interview 29.9.00 count 1/A 190

¹⁷ Chris Arthur interview 29.9.00 count 1/B 140-180

¹⁸ Chris Arthur interview 29.9.00 count 1/B 185

within the Post Office Group. On the one hand, Post Office Consulting resents the amount BPCS pays them to use their consultants on lucrative overseas contracts, and cannot see any reason why BPCS should not become part of Post Office Consulting anyway.¹⁹ On the other hand, BPCS has been managing overseas contracts for decades, and has its own good reasons for wanting to remain a part of Post Office International Services; it does, after all, source consultants for its overseas contracts from other Post Office divisions. This tension between BPCS and PO Consulting was recognised widely among the PO Consulting participants in AKAP, particularly since there had been a rather public fall out between the respective heads of each organisation.²⁰

Chris' suspicions were also augmented by his awareness that there were widespread criticisms among some of the consultants in Argentina over his and BPCS' management and leadership of the Argentina Consultancy Project. In the words of Cynthia Houston, the head of BPCS, "Chris Arthur does not want this to become a stick to beat him over the head with."²¹

As explained in the opening section of this narrative, this was, for everyone concerned, a particularly difficult contract in a difficult set of circumstances for a difficult client. The aim is not to try to substantiate any of the conflicts which existed between stakeholders. This discussion is simply given to set the context in which the Argentina Knowledge Capture Project emerged. In particular it presents the perspectives of some key stakeholders and the context to some of the political tensions between them. The chapter will now go on to introduce what happened in the AKAP project and will start with who were the principle participants directly involved in the process.

¹⁹ Bob Field interview 5.11.99 p.23 of transcript

²⁰ Interviewees who go into the Post Office Consulting/ BPCS relationship in some depth are Bob Field, Malcolm Hart, Patricia Dalrymple, others are aware of the tension but not the reasons for it, for example, Teresa Singer, Polly Johnson.

²¹ Comment by Cynthia Houston at AKAP End of Stage 2 Board Meeting 10.2.00

5.3.1 *The AKAP Project Team*

Having agreed to take on the project, Patricia Dalrymple convened a Project Team which at the outset consisted of 5 team members - herself as Project Manager, and 4 'Product Managers' - Polly Johnson, Simon Mann and Andrew Church, all from Post Office Consulting, and Val Kennedy from Post Office Research Group. This core team was joined later by Amy Chan and Helen Orton who were brought into the project when the workload became too much for the existing team to cope with. Patricia selected a project team which she thought could work well together, not necessarily which was the most 'experienced.'²²

The participants all in one way or another had a learning objective. Polly Johnson had expressed an interest to Patricia about getting involved in a knowledge management project. For the past year Polly had been producing the Post Office Consulting internal newsletter, and being located within the KM Practitioner Group, she was frustrated that the Group "didn't seem to do it, they just seemed to talk about it ... all at a very high level, academic and not very practical and I thought, that's not how it should be and I want to get involved and make it practical."²³ When the AKAP opportunity came up it was ideal for Polly, particularly with her connection with Argentina - she had married an Argentinean whom she met when working in Buenos Aires, and was a fluent Spanish speaker.

Simon Mann was new to the organisation and the KM Practitioner Group, and with AKAP as his first taste of Knowledge Management related project work, he was keen to work hard and do a good job for Patricia. He views his own selection to the project team as being 'pulled out of the hat' of the 4 consultants who joined the Practitioner Group at the same time as him in August 1999. At the outset of AKAP he was excited about the prospect of being at the leading edge of knowledge capture on how to run a privatised Post Office and how to manage the

²² Patricia Dalrymple interview 27.4.00 count 1/B 215

²³ Polly Johnson interview 16.3.00 count 1/A 183

change to privatisation. He really believed that the project was going to have a real impact on the Post Office's preparation for the loss of its letter monopoly in 2002.²⁴

Andrew Church, as was explained in the Research Methods chapter, had become a member of Post Office Consulting for the purposes of the research, and was included in the project team as a result of the interest expressed to Patricia, as leader of the KM Consultancy, in getting involved in a live knowledge management project.

Val Kennedy very much had a learning objective, as her interest in AKAP was first and foremost in testing out the Knowledge Visualisation software as a viable way of deploying the 'knowledge' the project would capture. As much of her work is developmental, she was pleased to have the opportunity in AKAP to be doing and achieving something tangible.²⁵ Val's section of Research Group is very much at the leading edge of new technologies. Knowledge Visualisation is very much a theoretical way of modelling knowledge, so the opportunity to test it out on an actual document set was fortuitous.

These five Project Team members - Patricia, Polly, Simon, Andrew and Val - were the 'core' project team. They were joined later in the project by Amy Chan and Helen Orton. However, because they were not involved in the scoping of the approach or of the 'management' of the project, Helen and Amy are seen as peripheral to the core team and are not therefore introduced.

Polly, Simon, Andrew and Val were also given roles as Product Managers. This is PRINCE terminology: PRINCE - or Projects In Controlled Environments - is the business standard for Project Management adopted by Post Office Consulting. Patricia had already decided to use PRINCE to manage the project. In her view this was the business' preferred process for project

²⁴ Simon Mann interview 16.5.00 count 1/A 424

²⁵ Val Kennedy interview 31.3.00 count 1/A 146

management, the senior management were trying to get people to use PRINCE, and as most of the participants were new to project management, then AKAP should be run using PRINCE.²⁶

It emerged that use of PRINCE had a significant impact on the course of AKAP. This was perhaps evident in Patricia's early insistence on the importance of planning the process and her firm belief that if you get the planning right up front, the project runs itself. Much of the focus of early project meetings in September and October 1999 was on this project management planning and infrastructure. A detailed Project Initiation Document (PID - included as Appendix B of this thesis) was drawn up, going through several versions before being finally modified and ratified by the Project Board at the Project Initiation Meeting on October 27th 1999. As well as the Project Initiation Document, there were some 15 'product descriptions' providing a detailed breakdown of the 'products' which AKAP would deliver, and a staged project plan which showed how these deliverables would be achieved by the end of March 2000. The PID shows how the principle criteria to which the project was working was time, followed by quality then cost. At the Project Initiation Meeting Bob Field had said that the end of the financial year was the absolute limit and the project could not afford to drift.²⁷ This was perhaps why Patricia was so distraught when the project eventually overran into May. Her overwhelming emphasis was on sound management and an emphasis on delivering to time, and she placed a lot of faith in PRINCE to achieve this.

Despite Patricia's claim at the 1st AKAP Meeting that she did not "want it to turn into a huge bureaucratic PRINCE nightmare with Checkpoint Charlie meetings every 10 minutes"²⁸ the physical meetings of the project team were dominated by the PRINCE project planning process. Every project meeting involved going down and amending the project plan line by line, often to the loss of discussion needed within the Project Team about the knowledge management process itself - for example, important questions like what were the Project Team going to do

²⁶ Comment by Patricia Dalrymple at 1st AKAP meeting, 2.9.99 p.65 of fieldwork journal

²⁷ Note in fieldwork journal p.81

²⁸ Comment by Patricia Dalrymple at 1st AKAP Team meeting 2.9.99

with all this ‘knowledge’ once they had captured it, and how was this going to be synthesised into ‘key learning’ from Argentina. This type of discussion on the ‘doing’ of the project was left largely to TeamWeb, the Lotus Notes-based ‘virtual team’ software used by the AKAP Project Team. Patricia did not see it as her role to get directly involved in the knowledge management process. In her view, the “role of the Project Manager is not to do the doing, it’s to facilitate, co-ordinate and make sure things happen.”²⁹ Her claim that “I could project manage the building of a church”³⁰ indicated that she saw the subject matter of the project as incidental to her role of managing it.

However, this was a learning process for everyone concerned. None of the Project Team had any prior experience of a knowledge management project. None was able to make any predictions about how the process would go. The Project Team were looking to the Project Manager, despite her own lack of experience in knowledge management projects and the lack of time which she was able to commit to ‘doing’ the project. Much of the project work which she put herself down for originally was passed over to Simon in the course of the project. Simon in particular expressed his dismay that the project team largely had to work things out among themselves, despite his assumption Patricia would provide this direction.³¹

Patricia, on the other hand, was placing a lot of faith in the AKAP Project Board to provide the Project Team with the direction they needed. She recognised at the outset of the project that the team lacked prior knowledge about Argentina in order to make critical decisions about what it was doing and evaluate the knowledge captured on behalf of the organisation.³² Patricia was hoping that the Project Board, representing a cross-section of different stakeholders involved in the Argentina Project, would play a hands-on role in focusing the knowledge captured by AKAP and filtering the knowledge to audiences within the wider Post Office Group. In the end,

²⁹ Patricia Dalrymple interview 27.4.00 1B 178

³⁰ Patricia Dalrymple interview 27.4.00 1B 184

³¹ Simon Mann interview 16.5.00 count 1/A 488

³² Patricia Dalrymple interview 27.4.00

a considerable amount of project time was spent by the Project Team building up their own knowledge in order to be able to perform the function of capturing and deploying knowledge from Argentina.

5.3.2 The AKAP Project Board

As part of the PRINCE approach to managing AKAP, a Project Board was convened representing the various stakeholder groupings coalescing around the AKAP project. The Board consisted of;

- Bob Field, project sponsor and the Knowledge Director of Post Office Consulting
- Cynthia Houston, the acting head of British Postal Consultancy Services, or BPCS
- Carol Trotter, from the Commercial Management and Enterprise Practitioner Group of Post Office Consulting (this Group acts as the interface between BPCS, which manages overseas contracts and Post Office Consulting, which provides the consultants)
- John Macallan, Val Kennedy's boss at Post Office Research Group
- Teresa Singer, from Post Office Consulting's KM Consultancy, who was one of the original developers of the Knowledge Interview tool.

Each of these Board members has a role specifically defined in PRINCE terms (these are shown in p.7 of Appendix B, the AKAP PID). PRINCE defines Bob as the 'Senior Executive,' Cynthia and Carol as 'Senior Users' and John and Teresa as 'Senior Technical Advisers.' However, it is not known to what extent the Board members were even aware of their PRINCE roles and what this meant in practice.

Cynthia Houston the Acting Head of British Postal Consultancy Services (BPCS) was interested in getting involved in AKAP in order to find out more about what Post Office Consulting was doing in knowledge management. Cynthia had been developing the role of BPCS to 'leverage'

knowledge from international projects back into the business. Collaboration in the Argentina Knowledge Capture Project therefore provided a forum to examine an approach and different mechanisms which could be applied to fulfilling this role. However Cynthia always came to the table with the expectation that this project was to do with learning about the use of KM tools rather than capturing and disseminating knowledge about Argentina. This knowledge, she believes, “belongs properly” to Post Office International.³³ She could see that this was a Post Office Consulting project and therefore maintained an arm’s length involvement in AKAP. However, had she come to the Project Initiation Meeting at the outset of the project, she may have realised that the project team saw the project objectives both to do with learning about the knowledge management tools, *and* capturing and deploying knowledge from Argentina. Cynthia’s PRINCE role of ‘Senior user’ perhaps might have indicated that she was seen as someone who would be ‘using’ knowledge from Argentina captured by AKAP. It was not until the end of the ‘knowledge capture’ stage of AKAP in February the following year that Cynthia first came round the table with the other members of the AKAP Board.

Carol Trotter had a fairly uncomplicated perspective on AKAP. As a member of the section of Post Office Consulting which deals with its consultants abroad, she was regularly receiving information requests relating to work done in Argentina. Carol was looking forward to AKAP producing a central database of Argentina-related documents from which she could deal with these requests. It is for this reason that she was defined as one of the Project’s ‘Senior users’. Carol anticipated that rather than ‘end-users’ searching the database themselves, she would pull documents off the database on behalf of the people who requested information. She therefore had an implicit view of herself as a broker, rather than an ‘end-user’ of the knowledge which AKAP set out to capture.

³³ Comment made by Cynthia Houston at her Knowledge Interview pre-interview session with Andrew Church, 19.1.00

John Macallan was brought on to the Project Board to represent Post Office Research Group, which was the other funding stakeholder organisation in the project. John admitted to being not at all interested in Argentina as a project and the 'learning' opportunities for the business to be gained from it.³⁴ His interest in Argentina was purely as a vehicle for testing out the Knowledge Visualisation software. He had no prior knowledge of the project, and even towards the close of the project, he claimed still not to know much about the project. This was despite Patricia seeing the Project Board as the major user group. Nevertheless Patricia was glad she had brought him onto the Board, for she felt he brought a certain coolness and objectivity to the role.³⁵

Teresa Singer was brought onto the Project Board in the PRINCE role of Senior Technical Adviser. This was because of her prominent role in developing and managing the Knowledge Interview technique. It was always Bob's and Patricia's assumption that the principle tool for capturing the knowledge in this project would be the Knowledge Interview technique. Teresa was a particularly significant individual in the project. She was by far the most 'hands on' of the Board members, getting involved in the doing of the project through a direct interest in how the Knowledge Interview tool was being used.

This 'split personality' of Project Board member and acting Project Team member led Teresa to feel a sense of conflict between these two roles.³⁶ This was her first experience of a PRINCE board role. She set out to conduct her role with the assumption that it should involve being rigorous, impartial and policing the project with distance and objectivity.³⁷ Thus she chose not to conduct any Knowledge Interviews for AKAP as it was felt this may compromise her role of impartiality.³⁸ However, Teresa was inclined to intervene when it came to providing direction on how the Knowledge Interview product was being used in AKAP. This 'split personality' in

³⁴ John Macallan interview 31.3.00 count 1/B 020

³⁵ Comments by Patricia Dalrymple at project meeting 6.3.00

³⁶ Teresa Singer interview 17.3.00 count 1/A 060

³⁷ Teresa Singer interview 17.3.00 count 1/A 056

³⁸ Discussion with Teresa Singer by telephone 6.12.99. Noted in fieldwork journal p95.

the project is perhaps evident in the way she talks about the Board. Teresa is cynical “that the Board will have learned anything from Argentina”³⁹ but appears to talk about the Board as if they are a separate group of people.

Despite Chris Arthur’s early belief that he was an integral part of the AKAP project, Patricia had no intention of having Chris on her Project Board.⁴⁰ At the AKAP Brainstorm Meeting and following correspondence prior to the Project Initiation Meeting, Patricia construed Chris’ behaviour as trying to manage and control the project. Patricia was quick to emphasise that “he’s a stakeholder not a customer.”⁴¹ She later recognised that the project might suffer if there was not buy-in from Chris, but was prepared to accept this in order not to get embroiled in any ‘politics.’⁴² It was clearly Patricia’s fear that Chris was trying to control AKAP, and in order to distance the project from this ‘political’ dimension⁴³ she would not have Chris as part of the project management structure. However what is interesting is that the continuing Consultancy Project in Argentina (represented by Chris Arthur, as Head of the Project) *was* considered a principle audience for the knowledge which AKAP aimed to capture. Yet even though he was such a key stakeholder, and someone directly involved in the Argentina project, Patricia did not want Chris on the Board. As Chris pointed out in an email to Patricia before the Project Initiation Meeting;

“I believe that I have a senior user role ... I will be a senior user since I will be the key communicator of the learning as the main ‘frontman’ for the project. I honestly believe that I will use and rely on the material much more than either Cynthia or Carol.”⁴⁴

³⁹ Teresa Singer interview 17.3.00 count 1/B 225

⁴⁰ Comments by Patricia Dalrymple at AKAP team meeting, Chesterfield, 6.3.00. Note p.149 of fieldwork journal.

⁴¹ Comments by Patricia at Post-Brainstorm Meeting gathering of team members, 28.7.99

⁴² Comments by Patricia at 2nd AKAP team meeting 5.10.99 p.75 of fieldwork journal

⁴³ Patricia explicitly mentioned that this was a ‘politically sensitive’ project at the first two gatherings of the project team.

⁴⁴ Email from Chris Arthur to Patricia Dalrymple 27.10.99, copied to Project Team.

The AKAP Project Manager certainly treated the Board as the principle user group, and looked to the Board to help make decisions on what was valuable knowledge to ‘capture’ and where the knowledge should be ‘deployed.’ However, it is clear from the AKAP End of Project Evaluation Report that Patricia felt the Board had not fulfilled this function to the degree she would have liked or expected. Teresa Singer also recognised a ‘user’ role for the Board, but also questioned whether the Board had even engaged with the knowledge which AKAP captured - “the Project Board was there to pull out the learning from Argentina, but ask any of them to name 10 learning points ... what was the actual transference of the knowledge?”⁴⁵

5.3.3 *The AKAP approach to knowledge management*

Given the joint Post Office Consulting and Post Office Research Group funding of AKAP, this basically meant that between them they set the agenda. Chris Arthur or BPCS did not have much say in how the project was run. Moreover, there was clearly a difference of expectations between them as to what AKAP was about: From the project team’s perspective, this was about knowledge management across the Post Office - it was not just about Post Office Consulting, or BPCS, or the Argentina Project. From the outset there was an assumption that there were people in the wider Post Office who could benefit from this knowledge, and that the project was about them as well. Chris Arthur, however, believed that AKAP was first and foremost about the immediate needs of the Argentina project; “my view was that AKAP was more about giving than getting.”⁴⁶ Patricia’s view was that BPCS were not paying for the work, and Bob too felt that a financial contribution by BPCS to the project might have been a sign of many things.⁴⁷

However, Bob Field was putting up most of the money, and Patricia was clearly treating him in this light. Bob himself was fairly relaxed about what he wanted to achieve from AKAP. It was first and foremost an opportunity to test out the tools for knowledge management which Post

⁴⁵ Teresa Singer interview 17.3.00 count 1/B 001

⁴⁶ Chris Arthur interview 29.9.00 count 1/A 130

⁴⁷ Bob Field interview 17.5.00

Office Consulting had been developing. Despite his vision for 40% of Post Office Consulting using KM tools developed within the Knowledge Programme, Bob had not really seen any real evidence of them in action.⁴⁸ AKAP was therefore funded as a learning opportunity, to find out what works and what does not. A significant part of his motivation for engaging in AKAP was that “AKAP will also give us a story to tell, a conference to go to and an article to write.”⁴⁹ Bob really stressed the learning aspects at AKAP’s initial Brainstorm Meeting - he wanted to test the KM tools to see where they ‘break.’

At the outset, there was an assumption by both Bob and Patricia, that the Knowledge Interviews technique will be the principle tool used to capture the knowledge. According to Patricia, “there is not much else in the Knowledge Programme under capture.”⁵⁰ Teresa did not disagree; “if the project decides to go down the tacit route, then Knowledge Interviews is the major one.”⁵¹ Teresa was, after all, brought onto the Project Board under the assumption that the project would involve the use of Knowledge Interviews.

It was also clear that the use of the Knowledge Interview was linked to ideas about ‘tacit knowledge.’ Soon after Patricia met up with Derek Cresswell - who had been running the Singapore Post Knowledge Management Project - she had decided that AKAP would probably be focusing more on ‘tacit knowledge’, as opposed to the ‘explicit knowledge and information library’ approach which she believed to characterise Derek’s project.⁵² Bob Field seemed to corroborate that this is what Derek had been doing;

“His focus has been on the explicit knowledge, the documentation, the specification, and although he did a lot of the tacit stuff, I always felt that his heart was in capturing the hard-stuff.”⁵³

⁴⁸ Bob Field comments at Brainstorm Meeting 28.7.99

⁴⁹ Bob Field interview 17.5.00 count 1/B 123

⁵⁰ Comment by Patricia Dalrymple at 1st AKAP team meeting 2.9.99 p.66 of fieldwork journal

⁵¹ Comment by Teresa Singer at 1st AKAP team meeting 2.9.99 p.66 of fieldwork journal

⁵² Discussion with Patricia Dalrymple 24.6.99

⁵³ Bob Field interview 5.11.99 p.13 of interview transcript

Patricia, however, wanted to focus the project more on 'learning' from the tacit knowledge of the people working in Argentina.⁵⁴ She therefore envisaged two elements to the project - the 'tacit/ learning' side and an 'explicit' library. For this tacit side she was planning to use the Knowledge Interview, and for the 'explicit' side, an electronic repository of documentation from Argentina would be collected. It was this library which would capture existing knowledge in the form of documents to hand over to the Argentina Consultancy Project. This would also form the basis of the Knowledge Visualisation trial which Val was running. The Knowledge Interviews, on the other hand, were about capturing the 'key learning' from Argentina as interview case-studies and composite reports produced by the project team. At the outset of the Project, these were two separate strands.

At the initial Brainstorm meeting, Patricia stated strongly that the process would be driven by the needs of the audiences for this knowledge. She described this as 'starting with the audiences and working backwards,' that is, identifying and capturing knowledge for targeted audiences and deploying it to them. She also intended to focus on two or three key strands which the Board would assist in identifying.

The key language here is use of the terms 'capture' and 'deploy.' These terms were informed by the Knowledge Process Model - introduced in Chapter 3 - which is Post Office Consulting's definition of a knowledge management process consisting of four stages - capture, deploy, use and review. Neither Val nor Andrew were sure how the term 'deploy knowledge' was being used, and asked for clarification at the first AKAP team meeting. Val said explicitly that she thought the term deployment has a distinct usage within Post Office Consulting, and it is certainly not a term which is used in PORG.⁵⁵ Patricia and Teresa both referred to Post Office Consulting's Knowledge Process Model. While Teresa defined 'deploy' as 'making it available

⁵⁴ Patricia Dalrymple interview 10.6.00

⁵⁵ Val Kennedy interview 31.3.00 count 1/A 450

for deployment' Patricia preferred to talk about 'taking the knowledge to its users.'⁵⁶ Bob also stressed that knowledge management involves a strong element of doing a 'selling' job with the knowledge. Deployment of the knowledge was therefore conceived as a stage in the project which came after the knowledge capture phase, and would involve arranging presentations and workshops, much as Derek Cresswell had done at his Singapore Post Workshop in August 1999. This highly successful event involved presentations by the experts who had been working in Singapore, to a targeted audience of key managers from across the Post Office. A number of the participants in AKAP had attended this event, and were keen to see similar types of event coming out of AKAP.

The explicit objectives of AKAP were formalised in the Project Initiation Document (Appendix B) and are also given here:

- To capture and deploy the key knowledge gained from the 'Argentina experience'
- To evaluate the effectiveness of Knowledge Interviews and Knowledge Visualisation as tools for knowledge capture and deployment
- To provide a summary of the learning gained from the Argentina experience
- To make recommendations for on-going knowledge review, capture, deployment and application in Argentina
- To produce a model for future knowledge capture assignments

That Knowledge Interviews were intended to capture the 'tacit' knowledge, and the EFC to capture the 'explicit' knowledge, was clear in the PRINCE Product Descriptions which were written for each of the elements of the project. The AKAP Products were divided up in four stages:

⁵⁶ Discussion at 1st AKAP team meeting, 2.9.99, pp65-66 of fieldwork journal

In the first phase, a Knowledge Map would be produced. The purpose of the AKAP Knowledge Map was to indicate the knowledge areas which AKAP was interested in capturing, mapped against who is likely to have that knowledge and the potential audiences for it. This was produced in advance of the Project Initiation Meeting so that the Project Board could take a view on which areas of the Knowledge Map to concentrate the project on.

The second phase would involve capturing the ‘tacit’ knowledge, using principally the Knowledge Interview tool, and capturing the ‘explicit’ knowledge in the form of an electronic Notes-based library. Although the Knowledge Interview was the principal tool planned for the ‘tacit’ knowledge capture strand, given the large number of consultants and UK-based staff involved in the Argentina Consultancy Project (estimates put the number above 40) the AKAP budget was not sufficient to conduct a full Knowledge Interview with all of them. Also it was felt that the full Knowledge Interview process would not give value for money where the subject’s involvement with the Argentina Consultancy Project was limited. For this reason, AKAP developed two other tools for capturing their knowledge: ‘Shorter’ interviews were adapted from the Knowledge Interview approach, and a Questionnaire was constructed based on the Knowledge Map as an alternative way of reaching people.

The third phase is described in the AKAP PID as ‘Analysis and Report writing’ in which a number of deliverable reports would be produced by the Project Team arising from what knowledge the project had captured, and what had been found from using the KM tools, including Knowledge Visualisation. The reports planned were:

- Tools evaluation report for Post Office Consulting and PORG
- Learning Summary Report for BPCS and Post Office Consulting
- Recommendations for on-going knowledge management in Argentina
- Model for future knowledge capture assignments for Post Office Consulting

In the fourth stage, AKAP would move into deployment of the knowledge which it had captured and synthesised into these various deliverables. The principle modes of knowledge deployment were segmented into individual AKAP Products as Workshops, Presentations, Knowledge Visualisation, and Articles (for various Post Office wide publications).

5.3.4 *What AKAP delivers*

Patricia recognised at the outset that as the project team did not have the knowledge of what is going on in Argentina, it was going to be necessary to involve others, both in an advisory capacity and in order to perform part of the knowledge capture and deployment. The Project Team therefore involved other key stakeholders, such as Chris Arthur in the case of the Knowledge Map, and Carol Trotter in the selection of Knowledge Interviewees. Some members of the AKAP Project Team were also surprised to learn that, while some Knowledge Interviews would be conducted by the Project Team, it was also going to be necessary to sub-contract other Interviews out to other trained Knowledge Interviewers. This was because of the numbers involved and the tightness of an ambitious knowledge capture programme.

In the original Product Descriptions there were plans to conduct 10-15 Knowledge Interviews, 15-25 Shorter Interviews and 20-30 Questionnaires. In the end, the following people had their knowledge ‘captured:’

Knowledge Interviews (10)	Shorter Interviews (6)	Questionnaires (6)
Chris Arthur	Ruth Baker	Martyn Bakewell
Jenny Bailey	Paul Chase	Frank Chandler
Sandy Buxton	Karl Fender	Carol McDonald
Jim Cartwright	Don Gresham	Will Padget
Rick Donaldson	Jack Hemmings	Ben Taylor
Nigel Hale	Carol Trotter	Robin Tyler
Cynthia Houston		
Judy Kirkwood		
David Orr		
Rodney Wallis		

All consultants who had been long-term residents in Argentina were invited to take part in Knowledge Interviews. This was considered to be the fairest and most neutral basis for selection: The Project Team had no other basis on which to judge who should be Knowledge Interviewed and who should qualify for the Shorter Interview treatment. This main capture phase was originally intended to be completed by the end of January, but due to the logistics involved in getting Interviewers and Interviewees together, the last Knowledge Interviews were still being conducted in early March.

Within the team, Knowledge Interviews were conducted by Andrew Church, and by Polly Johnson, once she had been on the Knowledge Interview training course. As Simon was not able to go on the training course, he was only allowed to conduct a Shorter Interview for the project. The remaining interviewers were located from Post Office Consulting's pool of trained Knowledge Interviewers: An email was sent around them all asking who was available to conduct interviews and the following people were ultimately sub-contracted as Interviewers: Russell Bishop, Faith Bradshaw, Andrea Campbell, Christine Connors, Derek Cresswell and Martin Healey. The selection was usually on ease of logistics, that is, availability and proximity.

A diagrammatic representation of the individual participants in AKAP and the 'spheres' of their participation is given in Figure 5.1 on page 125 of the thesis. It is hoped that, as the analytical chapters proceed, this diagram will act as a reminder to the reader of who the various actors are and where they fit together.

As well as the many Interview transcripts and interview case-studies which were collected during this phase, the AKAP Electronic Filing Cabinet was also collecting hundreds of documents of various types - project documentation, presentation slides, knowledge reports (written by Argentina Consultants as Handover reports when they left). It was not until the documents started to pile up that the project team realised they did not really have much of an

idea how to turn the 'knowledge' into the synthesised 'learning reports' which the project aimed to deliver. It was therefore decided to hold an Analysis Meeting to pull out the 'key knowledge,' and also to give the team something to take to the End of Stage 2 Board Meeting on February 10 2000: This was the hiatus between AKAP capturing knowledge and AKAP deploying knowledge, and Patricia was determined that the Board would now provide direction to the subsequent analysis and deployment phases. The project time scales were also slipping heavily. All the project team members underestimated the amount of 'knowledge' which would be captured by the process, and all ended up spending more time on the project than they had anticipated.⁵⁷ At the critical End of Stage 2 Board meeting, the team urgently needed the Project Board to give direction on where to go from here - what was AKAP deploying and where should the knowledge be deployed to?

It was not until the critical End of Stage 2 Board Meeting in February 2000 that the Project Board was together in its entirety for the first time. The project had been running since the initial Brainstorm Meeting for some 6 months. Crucially this was the first time Cynthia Houston had come to the table and was able to represent BPCS' view on what knowledge AKAP was deploying. In BPCS' view, this project was *only* deploying the 'learning' gained from applying Post Office Consulting's KM tools, not the 'learning' about the Argentina project. Up to this point the AKAP Project Team had been assuming that the two went hand-in-hand: The team were working towards the number one objective in the PID to 'capture and deploy the key learning gained from the Argentina experience' as a vehicle for discovering what the tools could do by way of knowledge management.

At this crucial Board Meeting Patricia was shocked at the 'politics' between Post Office Consulting and BPCS, which she believed resulted in a lack of decision making at the meeting over what AKAP was allowed to say.⁵⁸ Not willing to be treated like a 'political football,'

⁵⁷ This was noted by all project team members when interviewed for the research

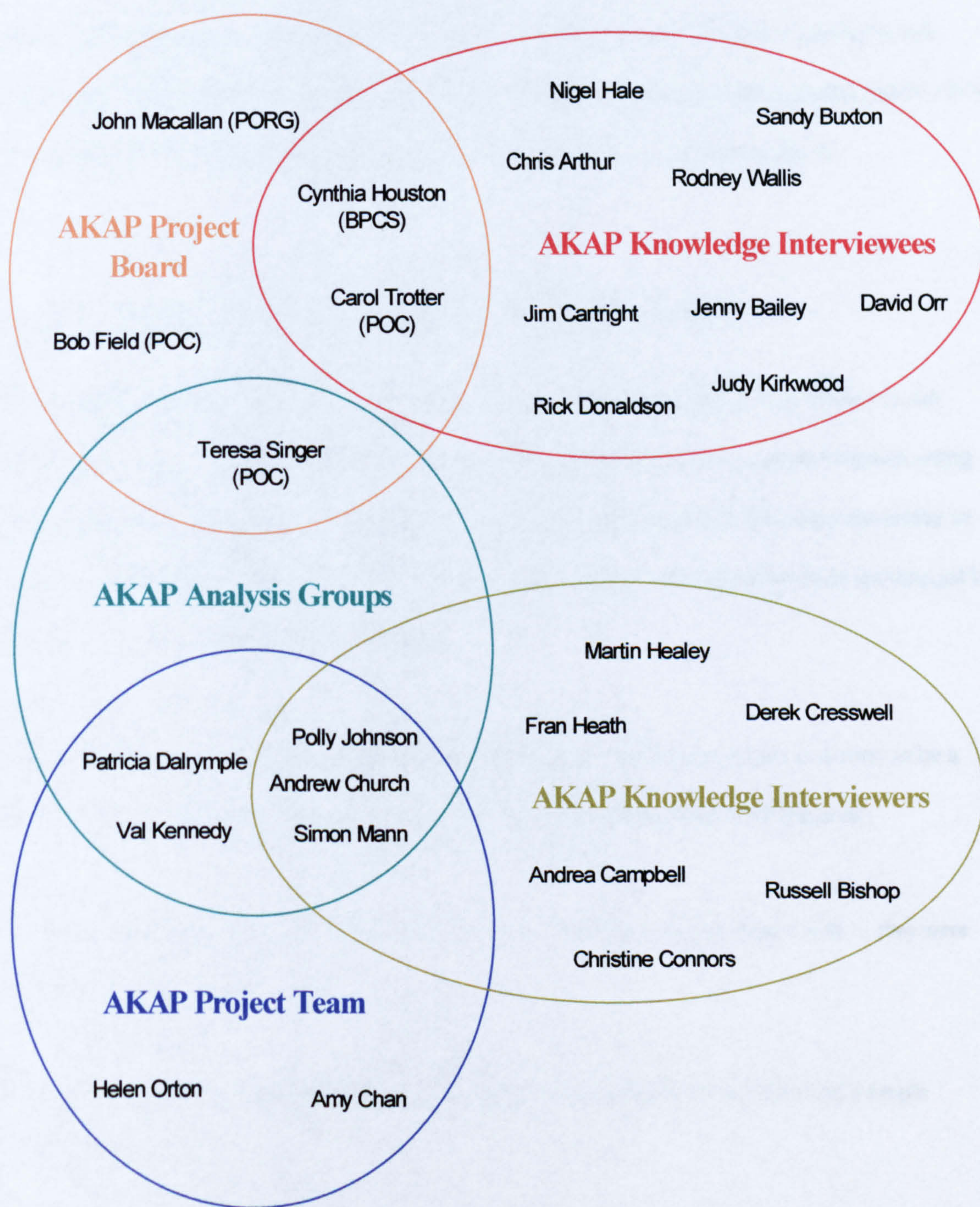
⁵⁸ Patricia's wrath and its colourful language is recorded in fieldwork journal pp.126-127

Patricia retrenched into her role of Project Manager and slashed back on all the deployment plans related to 'learning' from Argentina - that is, the planned workshops, presentations and journal articles. In the end, the only presentations made by AKAP were one at Post Office Consulting's 'Learning Zone' about the use of Knowledge Interviews to an audience of trained Knowledge Interviewers; and one at Post Office Research Group on the application of the results of the Knowledge Visualisation software trial. 3 articles were written for Post Office Consulting and PORG journals on these subjects.

The other deliverables of AKAP were all in the form of text-based documents, or were at least predicated on electronic texts, as in the cases of the AKAP Electronic Filing Cabinet (EFC) and the Knowledge Visualisation trial. Ultimately the AKAP knowledge capture outputs were all stored on the EFC, that is, the Knowledge Interviews transcripts and case-studies and the outputs from the Shorter Interviews and Questionnaires. This also became the repository for the AKAP Project Reports, although these were also distributed in hard copy to the Project Board. The EFC in its principle role contained upwards of 300 documents which AKAP had captured from the Argentina Consultancy Project.

Despite an explicit intention at the outset of AKAP that this was about brokering the movement of specific knowledge to specific audiences, the project became almost entirely dominated by capturing knowledge then working out what to do with it. The deployment of knowledge did not happen to anything like the degree the Project Team anticipated. This may have been fortuitous considering that this was clearly an over-ambitious project plan, and certainly one which had tightly prescribed a largely unknown process.

Figure 5.1 Participants in the Argentina Knowledge Capture Project



5.4 Knowledge codification processes and forms from the data

The chapter now goes on to show how the knowledge management activity occurring in Post Office Consulting - defined in AKAP as 'knowledge capture and deployment' - can be seen in terms of knowledge codification processes and forms. The research process expected to see knowledge codification featuring as part of an approach to knowledge management, particularly in the light of how knowledge codification was characterised in Chapters 1 and 2.

5.4.1 *Treatment of knowledge codification by other participants*

It is important to note that knowledge codification - in terms described by the thesis - is not generally a term used by the participants themselves. The research observed participants using their own terms of reference, and participants were not explicitly asked what they are doing in terms of knowledge codification. The concept of knowledge codification has been introduced by this thesis to *interpret* what they are doing.

Where a few participants in the research did use the term 'codification', this is shown to be a fairly narrow conception of the concept, related to information storage and retrieval;

"Rolls Royce were using the Intranet in a very codified way, which I don't agree with ... they were using codified stuff."⁵⁹

"most organisations have lost the art of libraries, the old art of filing, the art of having a simple codification."⁶⁰

"I got ASLIB (the library people) in about 4 years ago to do some work on that, and they were going to spend a lot of time designing a codification infrastructure, with key words, sub-categories and

⁵⁹ Andrea Campbell interview 28.3.00 count 1/A 730

⁶⁰ Bob Field interview 5.11.99 p.21 of transcript

groups ... with a view of creating a wonderful glossary of terms to use as a way of codifying our documents in databases. But I knocked it on the head basically ... it's an element of KM, but a very small element and I saw that the technology would make codification irrelevant - if we could get these intelligent agents deployed, it would make codification and storage irrelevant.”⁶¹

Only one participant parted from this narrower view of codification, to present an understanding of codification integrated with a more holistic view of knowledge management;

“I think codification is identifying a procedural approach to a problem or a task, and documenting that so it could be, how do you put together a finance strategy, or how do you put together a delivery operation, and there are key steps and there are key models you will use, and there are key reports that we will use, and that is the RM Consulting approach to doing ... knowledge management.”⁶²

It would appear, therefore, that codification is not a term used by the participants in the fieldwork with the same breadth as the stance on knowledge codification adopted by this thesis.

5.4.2 *Treatment of knowledge codification by this thesis*

It would be useful to recap on how a stance on *knowledge codification as process* was developed earlier in the thesis:

- Knowledge codification is taken to be a means by which individuals process their knowledge into information in order to communicate their knowledge between each other

⁶¹ Paul Butcher interview 3.8.00 count 1/B 035. In this case, Paul was specifically asked about his understanding of the term codification, as the opportunity was relevant to the context. This was also the case with Tim Bray. However, the other respondents ‘volunteered’ their use of the term.

⁶² Tim Bray interview 12.4.99 p.6 of transcript. It is important to note that this discussion had come up in the context of Hansen et al’s (1999) recent article in the Harvard Business Review. Tim had read the article, and expressed a strong belief that Post Office Consulting have gone down the ‘personalization’ rather than the ‘codification’ route.

- Codification of knowledge is predicated fundamentally on the use of language as a basic form of code
- Languages link people who are able to decipher them - specialist languages are developed by communities of people sharing similar knowledge
- Codification of knowledge is taken as having a fundamentally social dimension

It was suggested that codification of knowledge is a significant feature of what organisations are doing to manage knowledge, and therefore the thesis set out to research processes of codifying knowledge in the organisation in a knowledge management context.

The Argentina Knowledge Capture Project was clearly an approach to managing knowledge. AKAP engaged in two main strands of knowledge capture activity. Using Blackler's framework (1995) to understand forms of knowledge capture, it is clear that the AKAP knowledge capture processes are predicated on the codified form:

- AKAP was capturing documents which had already been codified by the consultants themselves - so for example, Knowledge Reports, project documentation, presentations, etc. This arose from the objective of capturing the 'explicit' knowledge from the Argentina Consultancy Project. These 'explicit' documents were then stored and classified on an Electronic Filing Cabinet. In the sense of constructing and classifying a repository of codified knowledge, there are clearly processes of codification occurring here. The documents were also used in the Knowledge Visualisation trial, which is a software-based approach to the codification of already codified knowledge.
- AKAP was also capturing the knowledge of consultants through the use of Knowledge Interviews, Shorter Interviews and Questionnaires. This strand of AKAP was informed by the objective of capturing 'tacit' knowledge. The knowledge capture outputs were analysed, and the 'key learning from the Argentina experience' was then captured in the various written deliverables, for example, Knowledge Interview Case Studies and the AKAP

Learning Summary Report. There is also codification of knowledge occurring here. Unlike the codifying of already explicit knowledge - in the EFC and Knowledge Visualisation cases - this level of codification effectively creates the 'explicit knowledge.'

These two strands of knowledge capture activity were seen as the basis from which to take 'key learning' from Argentina to its groups of assumed users. Although these were vaguely identified by the AKAP Knowledge Map, the precise needs of specific users were not defined. This was the objective of 'deploying' the knowledge from Argentina, that is, once it had been captured. The project plan was thus staged for these processes to occur sequentially.⁶³

It is clear that the overall approach to AKAP was predicated on a model of first codifying and capturing knowledge, then taking this 'knowledge' to its users. This was despite an intention at the beginning of the project by many of the participants, that the process would predominantly involve workshops and presentations by the consultants themselves as a way of 'getting' the knowledge to its assumed 'users.' In the end the project was almost entirely dominated by the codification of knowledge into written text: Despite the distinction drawn in the project between capturing the 'tacit knowledge' and the 'explicit knowledge' as separate strands of activity, both activities were predicated on the creation and use of codified texts. The approach to knowledge management adopted by AKAP became dominated by codifying and capturing the knowledge of Argentina Consultants, then working out what to do with the knowledge once it was captured.

5.4.3 Organic and managed knowledge codification

It is important to emphasise again that the empirical focus of this thesis is on the codification of knowledge occurring in a context of knowledge management. However, in addition to the codification which was occurring in order to conduct knowledge management from Argentina,

⁶³ See page 9 of Appendix B.

there were also clearly knowledge codification processes happening organically among the participants.

‘Organic’ codification of knowledge is a term introduced by this thesis. The organic codification of knowledge can be seen as codification processes occurring as part of the normal facet of human interaction and communication of knowledge. Organic codification of knowledge was occurring, for example, within the AKAP project team at project meetings and in the electronic communications TeamWeb. Of course these were occurring in the context of a knowledge management project. However, this type of knowledge codification is a very different proposition to the codification of knowledge which was occurring in order to capture and deploy knowledge from Argentina. So while the codification of knowledge through Knowledge Interviews would not have occurred without the intervention of AKAP, the Argentina consultants were nonetheless involved in codifying their own knowledge in the form of project and knowledge reports.

This analysis is interested principally in the codification of knowledge which occurred specifically in order to bring about the organisation’s objectives of knowledge management. Such processes are referred to as ‘managed’ codification of knowledge. As the focus of the research was principally on the activity around knowledge management, the research methods did not set out to observe ‘organic’ processes of knowledge codification among participants. The realisation that there were such ‘organic’ forms of codification occurring came too late on in the research process to make this a focus of observation.

Therefore the cases of knowledge codification used in the analysis focus exclusively on the knowledge codification occurring specifically in order to manage knowledge - or in some cases, to manage Knowledge Management.

5.4.4 Primary and secondary level codification

An interesting concept which also emerges is a distinction between what can be called ‘primary’ and ‘secondary’ level codification. The managed approach to codification taken by AKAP assumes that there is a ‘subject’ whose knowledge is the focus of capture. So in the case of the Knowledge Interviews, a primary level of knowledge codification is occurring when the Interviewee’s knowledge emerges during the interview process. A secondary level of codification occurs when the Knowledge Interviewer produces a ‘case-study’ from the Interview transcript. Secondary level codification also occurs in the case of the Analysis Meetings, where the Knowledge Interview material was collectively ‘analysed,’ and in the case of the AKAP EFC. This distinction between primary and secondary codification is noted here, and is a heuristic used to consider what is happening in the analytical chapters.

The heuristic is used to note a distinction between a primary ‘separation’ of knowledge from the individual knower. The distinction also serves to emphasis that subsequent individuals are involved in the codification of knowledge at a secondary level. In the case of AKAP, this secondary codification also occurred in a group context.

5.5 Table of knowledge codification processes and forms from the research data

The chapter now starts to focus down on the knowledge codification processes which form the basis of the subsequent analytical chapters. From the fieldwork research, it was possible to identify specific processes and forms of knowledge codification occurring within the knowledge management context in the organisation. These cases are presented in Figure 5.2. The AKAP related cases appear roughly in the sequential order in which they occurred within the project:

- AKAP Knowledge Map
- AKAP Knowledge Interviews and ‘Shorter’ interviews

- AKAP Knowledge Questionnaires
- AKAP Electronic Filing Cabinet
- AKAP Analysis Meetings
- Knowledge Visualisation
- AKAP Project Reports
- AKAP Journal articles

To the AKAP-specific cases are added two related cases of codification which were observed during the research:

- the codification of the Knowledge Interview technique
- the codification of Post Office Consulting's approach to KM

As the research questions seek to examine who is involved in processes of knowledge codification in a knowledge management context, the table applies three questions to each of the cases:

- Who is doing the codifying?
- Whose knowledge is being codified?
- Who is the knowledge being codified for?

This enables the thesis to focus and structure the subsequent analysis of knowledge codification processes.

Figure 5.2: Knowledge codification processes and forms from the research data

Codification process/ form	Who is doing the codifying?	Whose knowledge is being codified?	Who is the knowledge being codified for?
Argentina Knowledge Capture Project (AKAP) viewed as a whole	<i>Primary level</i> Argentina consultants and managers associated with the Argentina Project, although the process was not initiated by them (community)	<i>Primary level</i> Argentina consultants and managers associated with Argentina Project (community)	Assumed '3 rd party users'
A knowledge management project	<i>Secondary level</i> Knowledge Interviewers (community)	<i>Secondary level</i> Other project participants interacting with the process (formal groups)	On the AKAP Knowledge Map some are defined as organisations e.g. BPCS. Some are defined as groups, e.g. Commercial Management & Enterprise Practitioner Group.
A managed approach to the capture and codification of knowledge	AKAP Project team (formal group)		Continuing Argentina consultancy project
	AKAP Project Board (formal group, with individuals representing stakeholder organisations interests)		The AKAP project sponsor wanted a 'story to tell'
			All are formal groups, but their needs are unspecified
AKAP Knowledge Map	First stage - the knowledge areas and sub-areas of the Map were first codified by Chris Arthur, Rodney Wallis & Polly Johnson Second stage - Polly Johnson, Andrew Church & Patricia Dalrymple categorised the headings and sub-headings Final stage - Amy Chan translated the Post-Its into Powerpoint diagram (Individuals)	Principally Chris and Rodney's knowledge of the Argentina Consultancy Project and their expectations of what AKAP should capture. Amy, Polly, Andrew and Patricia structured the codified form of the Map but did not contribute knowledge of the Argentina consultancy project (Individuals)	The map was codified for the AKAP project team in order to guide and structure the project and the knowledge capture process. It was given to Interviewers to assist in the interview planning process (some used it more than others). The Map was also codified as a deliverable of the AKAP project, so for the Project Board . Two versions of the Map emerged for different user groups. (Individuals and groups)

Codification process/ form	Who is doing the codifying?	Whose knowledge is being codified?	Who is the knowledge being codified for?
AKAP Knowledge Interviews Also the related AKAP ‘Shorter Interviews’ process	<p>A number of parties are involved in the codification process.</p> <p>The project sponsor submits the ‘Request for Knowledge Capture’ (defines what to codify)</p> <p>The Knowledge Interviewer [community] initiates the process, conducts the Interview, and ‘analyses’ it into a case-study</p> <p>The Knowledge Interviewee [community] is codifying their knowledge in the Knowledge Interview, although through this medium the codification in effect is being ‘done’ to them.</p> <p>(Individuals)</p>	<p>Principally the Interviewee. However, the case-study report is clearly influenced by the knowledge of the Interviewer who codifies it, responsible for choosing what knowledge to abstract from the transcript.</p> <p>(Individuals)</p>	<p>The AKAP Knowledge Interviews were initiated by the project team - the team were actually the client of the consultant sub-contracted to conduct the interview. So on one level the Interviewers were codifying them for the Project Team</p> <p>However, the outputs of the interviews were first and foremost codified for use by assumed 3rd party user groups defined in the Knowledge Map, and anticipated, but unknown users of the AKAP EFC.</p>
AKAP Knowledge Questionnaires	<p>The subjects were given a template (questions based roughly on the areas of the Knowledge Map). The subjects then codified their knowledge themselves in the form of text and sent back an electronic copy</p> <p>(Individuals)</p>	<p>The subject’s own knowledge is codified in the process.</p> <p>The Questionnaire structure also represents the codified knowledge of its compilers - Simon assisted by Andrew</p> <p>(Individuals)</p>	<p>The respondents completed questionnaires for the project team. From the project team’s perspective, the knowledge was codified for the project sponsor and assumed 3rd party users.</p>

Codification process/ form	Who is doing the codifying?	Whose knowledge is being codified?	Who is the knowledge being codified for?
<p>AKAP Electronic Filing Cabinet</p> <p>A Lotus Notes-based electronic storage repository for the documents codified and collected by the AKAP knowledge capture process</p>	Principally Amy Chan and Val Kennedy (individuals)	<p>Amy & Val provided the main intellectual input to the construction of the EFC, although the knowledge had already been codified into the AKAP knowledge capture written outputs, i.e. documents</p> <p>EFC occurs at secondary level of knowledge codification (i.e. codifying knowledge already codified - information sources)</p>	<p>Assumed 3rd party users - hard copy sent to continuing project in Argentina</p> <p>Unknown future users</p> <p>EFC 'owners':</p> <p>Carol Trotter in Commercial Management & Enterprise Practitioner Group</p> <p>Cynthia Houston in BPCS</p> <p>The discourse over ownership & control of EFC, is seen as representing an organisational dimension to knowledge codification</p>
<p>AKAP analysis meetings</p> <p>A function of a managed approach to codification, although not part of the formal project plan</p>	<p>2 different formal groups:</p> <p>1st Analysis Meeting; Teresa, Patricia, Andrew, Simon, Polly</p> <p>2nd meeting; Teresa, Andrew, Simon, Polly, Val</p>	<p><i>Primary level</i></p> <p>Participants in the Analysis Meetings</p> <p><i>Secondary level</i></p> <p>Knowledge of Argentina consultants in Knowledge Interview outputs, Consultants Knowledge Reports etc.</p>	<p>AKAP project team in the form of a Learning Summary Report to present to the AKAP project board (formal groups)</p>

Codification process/ form	Who is doing the codifying?	Whose knowledge is being codified?	Who is the knowledge being codified for?
AKAP Knowledge Visualisation	This secondary level of codification sits on top of knowledge captured and codified by AKAP. The Knowledge Visualisation software used the AKAP documents (KIs, Knowledge Reports etc.) The technical work was performed by Chen Chaomei, a researcher from Brunel University.	Argentina consultants - in Knowledge Interview outputs and Knowledge Reports Chen's knowledge critical to some of the semantic decisions which need to be made to use the software	In order to trial and further develop the technique - so for the research community from which the technique emerges
AKAP written reports	Individual project team members, with comment and feedback from colleagues.	The report represents the individual author's knowledge, but does it represent group knowledge? The Learning Summary Report is the most group oriented of the AKAP reports	For the AKAP Board as deliverables. For the Project Team to communicate among group members what has been codified as group 'learning.' Continuing consultancy project in Argentina Assumed 3 rd party users.
AKAP Journal articles	Polly Johnson wrote articles for <i>White Space & In Touch</i> Val Kennedy wrote article for <i>Futures News</i> These are internal Post Office journals (Individuals)	The knowledge of the authors gained through participating in the AKAP process (Individuals)	They are very much codified for the audiences they serve - these can be seen as communities e.g. Post Office 'managers' as recipients of White Space. Futures News is of interest to research and technology oriented readers, particularly in PORG, hence the coverage of Val's article on the Knowledge Visualisation technique

Codification process/ form	Who is doing the codifying?	Whose knowledge is being codified?	Who is the knowledge being codified for?
<p>Codification of the Knowledge Interview technique</p> <p>Codified in the Knowledge Interview handbook and supporting documentation given to new Knowledge Interviewers at training workshop</p>	<p>The original 3 developers, Philip Connelly, Teresa Singer, Gary Dalton.</p> <p>Formerly a formal group, but now a community</p> <p>Note that this was not observed in process</p>	<p>The knowledge of the 3 developers was codified in the technique, assisted by groups participating in the trials.</p>	<p>In order to support the use of the Knowledge Interview as tool and technique, and as supporting material for the Knowledge Interviews training workshop</p>
<p>Codification of Post Office Consulting's approach to KM</p> <p>The Post Office Consulting story and the codification of the Knowledge Programme</p>	<p>A community of key KM thinkers and shapers - principally Tim Bray, Paul Butcher, Bob Field, Malcolm Hart</p>	<p>Their own 'community' perspective on knowledge and KM</p> <p>It is codified in journal articles and business processes as the approach of the organisation</p>	<p>Internal In order to communicate and implement a corporate strategy for an internal audience</p> <p>External In order to act as a showcase to an external audience, e.g. in published journals and at business conferences</p>

5.6 A framework for examining knowledge codification and focus on cases for analysis

The chapter by now will have demonstrated that the individuals involved in these processes, and the relationships between them are key to the shape and scope of what is occurring as knowledge management. The AKAP model was predicated first and foremost on capturing the ‘tacit’ knowledge of individuals.

AKAP also shows how the project itself was predicated on the use of formal groups to manage the process. Formal groups were formally and temporarily constituted, and were tasked with the objective of bringing about knowledge management. Formal groups were seen in the AKAP Project Team, the AKAP Project Board, and the Analysis Groups.

Furthermore there is an organisation dimension to the process, in the sense that individuals’ relationships at the organisational level clearly have a bearing on how they act. The AKAP Board was a coalition of individuals representing different organisational interests - those of Post Office Consulting, British Postal Consultancy Services and Post Office Research Group. The question of ‘who is the knowledge being codified for’ became quite significant at this organisational level.

As well as formal groups convened there were also informal groupings observed. There are also different interests represented by stakeholders in AKAP, such as the communities of Knowledge Interviewers (which was essentially a community linked by their knowledge and experience of working in Argentina) and the community of Knowledge Interviewees within Post Office Consulting. These groupings represent a more informal dimension to the contexts in which individuals in the process were interacting.

What is interesting is that these formal groups were constituted to engage in managing the knowledge of what was, in effect, a completely different community of practitioners. None of the consultants directly involved in the Argentina Consultancy Project was directly involved in the formal groups put together to manage their knowledge.⁶⁴

Therefore it can clearly be seen that there are different levels of social interaction at which these knowledge codification processes are occurring in an organisational knowledge management context. These levels can be characterised as:

- an individual and individual-to-individual level
- formal groups
- an organisational level
- informal groups or ‘communities of practice’

As the focus of the research is on processes of knowledge codification as they are actually occurring, this ‘levels’ framework is a simple way of examining different social contexts of ‘managed’ knowledge codification in the organisation. The subsequent analytical chapters are therefore structured according to an examination of the different levels. From the Table presented in Figure 5.2, it is clear that certain cases are particularly illustrative of each of the levels presented.

In the subsequent analytical chapters the following of the cases identified in Figure 5.2 are analysed in greater depth:

⁶⁴ Apart from Cynthia Houston of BPCS who was involved in the management of the contract, but not the consultancy work itself.

Chapter 6, *Codification of knowledge at the individual level* draws principally upon the cases of the AKAP Knowledge Map and the AKAP Knowledge Interviews.

Chapter 7, *Codification of knowledge in formal groups* draws principally upon the cases of the AKAP Analysis Meetings and the codification of AKAP Project Reports.

Chapter 8, *Codification of knowledge at the organisational level* examines a discourse over access to the AKAP Electronic Filing Cabinet, which was part of a wider discourse over ownership of AKAP knowledge at an organisational level.

Chapter 9, *Codification of knowledge in informal groups* draws upon the cases of the codification of the Knowledge Interview technique, and the codification of Post Office Consulting's approach to KM.

Chapter 10, *Knowledge management and the codification of knowledge in the organisation: A synthesis* then draws out the main findings and examines the key themes which have emerged from this research into processes of knowledge codification in a knowledge management context.

CHAPTER 6: CODIFICATION OF KNOWLEDGE AT THE INDIVIDUAL LEVEL

6.1 Introduction

This chapter presents cases of knowledge codification occurring at an individual level. Chapters 1 and 2 developed the concept of codification as a way in which knowledge comes ‘out’ of people. Individuals can communicate their knowledge by codifying it as information. The individual level to the codification of knowledge is therefore fundamental. Chapter 5 showed that in the Argentina Knowledge Capture Project (AKAP) the mode of knowledge management adopted was predicated on capturing - or in the words of this thesis, codifying - the knowledge of consultants who had been working on the Argentina Consultancy Project. AKAP engaged in further processes of knowledge codification which depended upon the knowledge codified at this individual level.

This chapter therefore focuses on cases of knowledge codification which occurred at an individual level. It presents cases of what Chapter 5 described as ‘managed’ codification, where AKAP intervened in order to broker the ‘capture’ and ‘deployment’ of knowledge. The cases presented are the AKAP Knowledge Map and the AKAP Knowledge Interviews.

The Knowledge Map and the Knowledge Interview illustrate two modes of codifying knowledge at this individual level:

- individuals codify their own knowledge - as in the case of the participants who codified the AKAP Knowledge Map
- or the codification is ‘done’ to individuals, in the sense that someone else intervenes to codify the individual’s knowledge - as in the case of the AKAP Knowledge Interviews¹

¹ Although of the course the interviewee is doing the codifying at a primary level.

The AKAP Knowledge Map is presented first as it occurred at the outset of the project, and it impacted upon the course of subsequent knowledge codification processes. Each of the Knowledge Interviews is a separate case of knowledge codification and is treated as such in the chapter.

6.2 The AKAP Knowledge Map

The AKAP Knowledge Map was produced at the outset of the project in order to guide the subsequent knowledge capture and deployment process. As shown in Chapter 5, the AKAP Knowledge Map can clearly be seen as a case of knowledge codification. It was designed to be used as information about knowledge: It shows what areas of knowledge people have about the Argentina Consultancy Project, it suggests who that knowledge can be captured from, and indicates the audiences within the Post Office which this knowledge could be deployed to.

Patricia Dalrymple, the AKAP Project Manager, originally came up with the idea for the Knowledge Map, in order to Map out the knowledge ‘terrain’ of the Argentina Consultancy Project. This was done at the scoping and planning stage of AKAP, that is, before the official Project Initiation Meeting. Patricia’s idea was that the Project Board would study the Map and use it to make key decisions at the outset of the project: First, which areas of the Knowledge Map to concentrate the knowledge capture exercise on, and which individuals to target; and second, who to deploy this knowledge to within the Post Office Group. This is clear from an email she sent to the AKAP Project Team early on in the project;

I also think that we should aim to put the knowledge map together before we finalise the Project Initiation Document because I think that the biggest area of contention at the Project Initiation Meeting will be about exactly what knowledge we are aiming to capture i.e. what does the sponsor (and project board to a certain extent) feel that the project should be aiming to capture.²

² Email from Patricia Dalrymple 10.10.99

The Knowledge Map was also distributed to AKAP Knowledge Interviewers in order to assist them in planning the interview process, so the Knowledge Interviewers were a major ‘user’ group.

The AKAP Knowledge Map is based, at a primary level, on the knowledge of two key Argentina consultants, who were involved in codifying it:

- Chris Arthur, the Programme Director in Argentina, who was introduced in Chapter 5
- Rodney Wallis, a member of Post Office Consulting’s KM Practitioner Group, who had worked on the Argentina Consultancy project, but was now returned to the Practitioner Group.

AKAP team members Patricia Dalrymple, Polly Johnson, Andrew Church and Amy Tan were also involved at various subsequent stages in a secondary level of codification of the Map. This case shows how the secondary involvement of project team members - who themselves had little knowledge of the Argentina Consultancy Project - had the effect of changing the knowledge originally codified by Chris and Rodney. Furthermore, despite Patricia’s intention for the Board to develop a view on the Map, this did not happen. The Knowledge Map went through a number of stages of involvement of individuals, yet a group perspective on the Map was not achieved.

The AKAP Knowledge Map takes the form of a 2-page PowerPoint diagram, which is given as Appendix C of this thesis. This is the final version of the AKAP Knowledge Map - i.e. the version which was approved as a deliverable of the Project and used to brief Knowledge Interviewers. The first page highlights 7 broad areas around which knowledge of the Argentina Consultancy Project can be grouped. These are:

- Pre-award phase
- Contract
- Client relationship
- People
- Environment
- Technical areas
- Project organisation

For each of these broad areas, potential audiences for the knowledge captured are identified along with the individuals who are likely to have knowledge of that area. The second page provides a key to the initials used on the Map itself. The second page key is not included in Appendix C in order to preserve the anonymity of the people involved.

In order to give a sense of how the AKAP Knowledge Map fits into the overall project, the following is an extract from the PRINCE 'Product Description' for the Knowledge Map:

Purpose

- To ensure that the project captures and deploys the most appropriate and relevant knowledge
- To provide direction to the project team and the key deliverables and products of the project

Composition

Document highlighting:

- the key areas for knowledge capture
- the key individuals required for knowledge interviews
- the key individuals required for other interviews
- the key individuals required for questionnaires
- the target audiences for 2 workshops
- the target audience for various presentations

The Product Description for the Knowledge Map clearly shows the expectation that the Knowledge Map would play a critical role in focusing the knowledge capture and subsequent knowledge deployment processes of AKAP.

The origins of the Knowledge Map go back to the first AKAP ‘Brainstorm Meeting’ on July 28 1999, when a few key stakeholders and future project team members got together to think about what areas a knowledge capture project for Argentina would cover. A memo written by Patricia Dalrymple to the invited participants suggested the following “Key areas for learning proposed to date”:

- The successful tender evaluation process
- Cultural issues regarding working overseas
- Cultural issues regarding working overseas as a resident consultant
- Operating in a deregulated, private sector postal environment
- Relationship management; with the host, client and shareholders
- Technical developments and deliverables”³

Although the agenda for the meeting suggested that the participants “identify and prioritise the key areas for knowledge capture from the Argentina experience” no such prioritisation occurred at the Brainstorm Meeting. The meeting consisted of an open discussion where every comment was written up on flip charts, with nothing discarded. The main participants were Bob Field, Chris Arthur and to a lesser extent, Nigel Hale, another of the Post Office Consulting consultants who had worked out in Argentina and had subsequently returned.

The result of this meeting was a document written by Patricia Dalrymple which she later referred to as the ‘3 areas document’ as it is organised into ‘Key areas for knowledge capture,

³ Email from Patricia Dalrymple 26.7.99

Key audiences for deployment, and Key people required for input to project scope.’ This document reflected precisely what had come out of the Brainstorm Meeting.

Following the Brainstorm Meeting Chris Arthur was keen to move things on,⁴ and he particularly wanted to get involved with compiling the Knowledge Map while he was in the country during October 1999. It was shown in Chapter 5 how early in AKAP he believed he had a central role in the project, whereas his eagerness to be involved was construed by Patricia Dalrymple as Chris trying to control what knowledge was captured.⁵

It transpired that Chris Arthur’s understanding of the role of the Map was very different from how Patricia perceived it.⁶ Chris saw the Map first and foremost as a way of organising a repository of the documentation which already existed around the Argentina consultancy project. This was very different from the AKAP Project Manager’s view that this was as a tool for organising the knowledge capture process itself.

The first session of the codification of the Map occurred when Chris Arthur, Rodney Wallis, and Polly Johnson, an AKAP project team member, met on 20 and 21 October.⁷ Patricia had given Polly the ‘3 areas’ document from the AKAP Brainstorm meeting. She had told Polly to start with the audiences and map what knowledge they would require. This concurred with Patricia’s intention that AKAP should be first and foremost about the use of knowledge from Argentina within the Post Office as a whole.

However, when it came to the meeting, Chris and Rodney felt that it was better to start with what knowledge they knew there was to capture, then to tag the ‘knowledge’ on to an audience.

⁴ Email from Chris Arthur to Patricia Dalrymple 23.9.99 before the Knowledge Map was produced recommends some broad headings for areas of knowledge to capture.

⁵ Comment by Patricia Dalrymple at meeting with Polly Johnson and Andrew Church.

⁶ Chris Arthur interview 29.9.00 count 1/A 530

⁷ This account of the Knowledge Map meetings between Chris, Rodney and Polly was related by Polly Johnson at a follow up meeting on 22.10.99 when Polly met with Andrew Church and Patricia Dalrymple to reorganise the Post-It notes generated at the Knowledge Map meetings. Notes on pp. 72-73 of the fieldwork journal.

Chris was worried that starting with the audiences might miss out some crucial areas of knowledge worth capturing. Polly had the impression that Chris wanted to “capture everything.”⁸ Polly felt afterwards that she should have insisted on the approach of starting with the audiences. However, she said she could not come up with a reason not to follow Chris and Rodney’s approach. Hearing this explanation, Patricia responded, “that’s fine by me, it’s easier in a way.”⁹

The result of this meeting between Chris, Rodney and Polly was a mass of sticky notes of what Rodney and Chris wanted to see captured. In a subsequent stage of codification of the Map Polly, Patricia and Andrew Church, another AKAP Project Team member, got together to group these sticky notes under broad headings.¹⁰ The sticky notes were typed up into a PowerPoint document under these broad headings by Amy Chan. This preliminary ‘raw’ document ran to some 15 pages of PowerPoint slides.

Following this, Chris Arthur went away and, unbeknown to the Project Team, did substantial work in tidying and reorganising this raw document before the AKAP Project Initiation Meeting. This version arrived in the email to Patricia Dalrymple previously referred to in this section, which made her annoyed at what she perceived as his attempts to control the project.¹¹ Nevertheless, Polly felt that Chris’ detailed version was better than the raw version, and suggested that the team take both versions to the Project Initiation Meeting on October 27 1999.¹²

The agenda for the AKAP Project Initiation Meeting on 27.10.99 included a substantial slot for discussing the Knowledge Map. However, due to extensive discussion of the Project Initiation

⁸ Notes pp.72-73 of fieldwork journal

⁹ Meeting between Patricia Dalrymple, Polly Johnson and Andrew Church 22.10.99. Note on p.72 of fieldwork journal.

¹⁰ Ad hoc meeting on 22.10.99 the day after Polly’s meeting with Chris and Rodney

¹¹ Comments by Patricia Dalrymple at pre-PIM team meeting 27.10.99

¹² Comment by Polly Johnson at pre-PIM team meeting 27.10.99

Document, the meeting ran out of time and discussion of the Knowledge Map was dropped. Bob Field felt that the Map could be commented on outside the meeting.¹³ In the event, this group discussion outside the meeting did not occur.

Bob *had* said at the meeting, however, that when it came to the Knowledge Map, he considered there to be “diminishing returns in going down the alleys, whereas we want to go down the motorways.”¹⁴ As a result of Bob’s recommendation, the detailed versions of the Knowledge Map were condensed into a higher-level one page Map. Only this one page Knowledge Map was sent by Polly to Bob Field for his final comments:¹⁵

“Attached is version 3 - the motorway (+ a couple of A roads) which links the main areas, audiences and key people (slide 2 explains who the initials represent). The main input into this comes from meetings with Rodney Wallis and Chris Arthur. Am planning to send out to Chris and Rodney for comment, and also to Rick Donaldson, Nigel Hale, Carol Trotter and Martin Besant for further input and prioritisation on who should get the full knowledge interview, other interview and/or questionnaire - does this seem about right - am I missing anyone, or is it too many?

Bob, in terms of areas to capture, does this hit the spot? Are we missing anything key, or capturing areas which are of little/no interest to anyone?”¹⁶

The terse response came from Bob Field;

“The map looks good to me. I have no comments. Can we send it off to Chris for information.”

Note that it was only sent to Bob, and no other AKAP Project Board members. Once approved by Bob, this one-page Map was then sent on to the others mentioned in Polly’s email for further

¹³ AKAP Project Initiation Meeting 27.10.99 - notes p.81 of fieldwork journal

¹⁴ Notes on p.78-79 of fieldwork journal.

¹⁵ Email from Polly Johnson to Bob Field 1.11.99 copied to Andrew Church, Simon Mann & Val Kennedy

¹⁶ Email from Polly Johnson to Bob Field 1.11.99 copied to Andrew Church, Simon Mann & Val Kennedy

comment and help in prioritising who to target as participants.¹⁷ However, it appears that no subsequent changes were made to the Map. The final high-level version which was approved by Bob Field is the one which appears as Appendix C.

This process effectively removed the detailed version of the Knowledge Map produced by Chris Arthur from use, and kept the Knowledge Map at a broad and high level. When the Map was subsequently given to Knowledge Interviewers, only this one page summary was sent out. As shown in the following Knowledge Interviews, in some cases this sent the message that AKAP wished to capture knowledge on all areas of the Map. Chris Arthur felt that this high level Map was of little use in focusing the knowledge capture process. His view was that AKAP would start off broad, collect documentation already available, then home in on 4 or 5 key areas. In the end he felt that the “decision was taken that we go in for a general approach ... my view is that we have got 5% of everything and 100% of nothing.”¹⁸ As shown in Chapter 5, it was also Patricia’s intention that the project would focus in on a few key areas of knowledge to capture. She had tried to get this process of prioritisation started at the Brainstorm Meeting. However, it did not occur there. Her expectation in producing the Map was that it would be used to get the AKAP project Board to take a view on which areas of knowledge capture they wanted to prioritise, then “forget all else.”¹⁹ However, this prioritisation did not occur in the way she hoped. Patricia’s hope that the project would ‘start with the audiences and work backwards’ also did not happen.

An interesting observations of this chain of events, is the way in which Chris and Rodney’s knowledge of the Argentina Consultancy Project was distilled by the involvement of AKAP participants. Here was a different set of individuals, who had no direct knowledge of the

¹⁷ Email from Polly Johnson to Nigel Hale, Rick Donaldson, Rodney Wallis and Carol Trotter 5.11.99. Only Carol Trotter replied.

¹⁸ Chris Arthur interview 29.9.00 count 1/A 350

¹⁹ Comment by Patricia Dalrymple at AKAP team meeting 5.10.99 - note on p.69 of fieldwork journal. Repeated at meeting between Patricia, Andrew Church and Polly Johnson 22.10.99 - note on p.73 of fieldwork journal. Repeated again at AKAP team meeting 28.10.99 note on p.83 of fieldwork journal.

Argentina project, modifying and condensing the knowledge of people who were directly involved in Argentina. While Chris and Rodney codified their own knowledge at a primary level in the Knowledge Map, it was no longer their knowledge once subsequent individuals had intervened.

The AKAP Knowledge Map had a significant impact upon the subsequent codification processes which occurred as part of AKAP. This can be seen in some of the individual Knowledge Interview cases, to which this chapter now turns.

6.3 AKAP Knowledge Interview cases

The Knowledge Interview technique was introduced first in Chapter 3 as one the key KM tools developed under Post Office Consulting's Knowledge Programme, and a basic description of the process was given. It was shown in Chapter 5 that there was an assumption on the part of the AKAP Project Sponsor, Bob Field, and the AKAP Project Manager, Patricia Dalrymple, that the Knowledge Interview would be used as the principal tool for capturing knowledge from consultants who had been working in Argentina. The PRINCE Product Description describes the purpose of Knowledge Interviews for AKAP as;

“to capture the tacit knowledge of the residents and other key people involved in the ‘Argentina Experience.’”

The thesis interprets the Knowledge Interview as a process of codifying knowledge. The remaining chapter examines the cases of Knowledge Interviews which occurred as part of AKAP. The codification of the Interviewees' knowledge is clearly occurring at an individual level. Unlike the AKAP Knowledge Map, in the Knowledge Interview cases there is another individual involved who also plays a critical role - the interviewer.

The individual Knowledge Interviews are presented in this chapter as separate cases. It is important to reflect the unique set of contexts involved in each interview, not least the interaction in each case between unique combinations of interviewer and interviewee. These 'dyadic' or 'one-to-one' relationships clearly have a bearing on the knowledge codification process. Other contextual circumstances impacting upon the codification of knowledge emerge in the course of the cases.

In Chapter 5 it was shown how the decision was taken to interview all individuals who had been working as long-term consultants in Argentina, plus two others who were linked to the Consultancy Project in significant roles. Most of the individuals approached were willing to take part in the knowledge capture exercise, apart from one who declined saying that he came back in 1998, had forgotten most of what he did in Argentina, and considered this knowledge capture project a "complete waste of time."²⁰ His unwillingness was also driven by his negative memories of the Argentina Consultancy Project as a "complete fiasco." However, most of the other individuals approached were happy to take part.

Once the interviewers had been selected from the pool of trained Knowledge Interviewers in Post Office Consulting, they were asked to contact the interviewee directly to make the necessary arrangements for conducting the Knowledge Interview. The AKAP Project Team gave the interviewers a standard briefing sheet, giving basic instructions including some brief details of the project, the time scales involved, where to get the tape recording of the interview transcribed, and the budget code to charge their time to. Interviewers were also given a copy of the Knowledge Map and asked to establish with their interviewees prior to the interview which areas of the Map to concentrate the knowledge capture process on. It was stressed to the interviewers that the Pre-Interview was an important stage in their determining the coverage of the interview and deciding on which areas of the Knowledge Map to cover. The interviewers

²⁰ Telephone conversation with Graham Verity 9.12.99 and subsequent email 10.2.00.

were also asked to deliver ‘case-studies’ of the interview in addition to the interview transcript.²¹ It was expected that as these were all trained Knowledge Interviewers, they would know how to conduct the process, and that they would be able to do so given the briefing information supplied by AKAP.

All of the Knowledge Interviews which took place for AKAP are presented. They are presented in alphabetical order of the interviewee’s first name.

6.3.1 Chris Arthur: Knowledge Interview by Derek Cresswell

It should be apparent by now that Chris Arthur, as head of the Argentina Consultancy Project in Buenos Aires, was an important figure in AKAP. Despite logistical problems over interviewing Chris and repeated delays threatening the timescale of AKAP, it was felt essential to include him as a Knowledge Interviewee. Consensus among the Board members was that Chris’ perspective on the Argentina Consultancy Project was essential to capture: There was clearly a political sensitivity surrounding Chris’ inclusion in the Knowledge Interview programme,²² notwithstanding the extent of his knowledge of the Argentina Consultancy Project. Chris’ interview finally got underway in late February 2000, when all of the other Knowledge Interviews for AKAP had been conducted. The AKAP Project Board members were already aware that some of the other interviewees had been very critical about how he managed and led the Argentina Consultancy Project, and it was important to gain his perspective. Derek Cresswell was selected as the interviewer, because of his availability and also because of his experience and interest in the Knowledge Interviews technique through his running of the Singapore Post Knowledge Management project.

²¹ The Pre-interview process and the production of ‘case-studies’ are specific terms used in the Knowledge Interview technique.

²² Comments by Bob Field and Teresa Singer at the AKAP End of Stage 2 Meeting, 10.2.00 - note on p.124 of fieldwork journal.

The Knowledge Interview took place over 3 sessions over the telephone, with Chris in Buenos Aires and Derek in London. Derek had problems with the recording equipment at the first interview session, and was only able to record the subsequent two. Derek had to spend some considerable time in the first interview session familiarising himself with the details of the Argentina project.²³

A 10 page interview 'case-study' was produced by Derek from the various bits of recording and written notes he had made of the interview. This is available for viewing as a Word document in the AKAP Electronic Filing Cabinet. The case-study has no title, or header and footer to indicate what the document is about, simply starting;

1. Background

CA was involved from May 1997 in preparing the bid by BPCS (as a member of a consortium) for the Argentina Government's privatisation of the Correo ...

The use of Chris' initials is surely not an attempt to preserve Chris Arthur's anonymity, particularly as the case-study appears under his name in the EFC and uses his initials. It is also interesting that Derek gives no explanation that the Correo is the Argentine Post Office. This may assume a level of familiarity on behalf of the reader, or may just be an oversight. Furthermore, Chris spotted an inaccuracy in this first line of the case-study, where Derek implies that BPCS were part of the consortium which bid for the Correo, whereas they were simply advisers to the consortium. Chris attributed this inaccuracy to Derek's lack of familiarity with the subject matter of the interview, and felt generally that Derek could have got more out of him if he had been more familiar with the work going on in Argentina.²⁴ This example suggests some inherent problems with the interviewer coming from outside the 'Argentina community.'

²³ Derek Cresswell interview 16.3.00 count 1/B 430

²⁴ Chris Arthur interview 13.4.00 notes p.1

In all, Derek conducted 3 interviews for AKAP; this Knowledge Interview with Chris Arthur and 2 Shorter Interviews. In his experience Derek found that writing the 'case-study' directly from listening to the tape recording was an effective way of going about it. To his mind this questioned the value of producing an interview transcript if its sole purpose is to be used to generate the case-study.²⁵ By the end of his AKAP experience, Derek said "I am still not sure what a Knowledge Interview is and what an analysis looks like, and maybe there isn't a single template."²⁶

Chris himself was not impressed with the Knowledge Interview as a way of capturing knowledge. At the outset of AKAP, in order to find out more about the Knowledge Interview process, Chris asked Patricia Dalrymple. He said she hedged for a bit, then gave him an example of a Knowledge Interview case-study which he thought was terrible, remarking ironically, "some of the AKAP ones were more professional than that. It's opinions not knowledge ... it's almost like an autobiography, more than helping you understand a different way of thinking or doing something."²⁷ Chris also got the impression that Derek was trying to cover all areas of the Knowledge Map.²⁸ There was clearly a substantial gap between his expectation of the Knowledge Interview process from what he had heard about it, and his impressions of what he was given as an exemplar. As he says of his own Knowledge Interview, "who the hell wants to read 18 pages of an interview with Chris Arthur to see if there is anything of use in there?"²⁹ His opinion, from seeing the interview outputs of other consultants, was that "Knowledge Interviews were probably very valuable in being cathartic exercises or people being able to get things off their chests ... there's danger in those Knowledge Interviews that it's taken as fact, whereas it's only opinion, and probably in the case of Argentina, loaded."³⁰

²⁵ Derek Cresswell interview 16.3.00 count 1/B 488

²⁶ Derek Cresswell interview 16.3.00 count 1/B 447

²⁷ Chris Arthur interview 29.9.00 count 1/B 200-216

²⁸ Chris Arthur interview 29.9.00 count 1/A 165

²⁹ Chris Arthur interview 29.9.00 count 1/A 176

³⁰ Chris Arthur interview 29.9.00 count 1/B 011

6.3.2 *Cynthia Houston: Knowledge Interview by Andrew Church*

Cynthia Houston was the UK-based member of British Postal Consultancy Services (BPCS) who scoped the tender for the consultancy project with the Argentine Post Office. She was then heavily involved in setting up the project and for its ongoing management on behalf of BPCS. Cynthia had a lot of contact with Chris Arthur during this time. Because of the extent of her involvement with the project, and her importance as a BPCS stakeholder in AKAP (remember she had been appointed to the Project Board), there seemed to be no question that she should not be the subject of a Knowledge Interview.

The Knowledge Interview took place over three sessions: A pre-interview session on 19 January 2000 and 2 main interview sessions on 25 January and 24 February. Despite his role as researcher, Cynthia clearly saw Andrew as a member of Post Office Consulting. This was evident in how she was careful prior to the first meeting to lay down the boundaries of knowledge between BPCS and Post Office Consulting: She warned that there is ‘commercial’ information she would be unwilling to give to Post Office Consulting, particularly on the contract side which she feels is only of use to her.³¹ In the Pre-interview session she repeated her impression that a lot of what AKAP was capturing, particularly on the contract side, is only knowledge that Post Office International Services can use’ and that her own knowledge of contractual management decisions “belongs properly” to International Services, having “no added value to Post Office Consulting.”³² This was an interesting statement given that AKAP, by this time, had not released any of the ‘knowledge’ it had been capturing, and in any case it was not capturing anything to do with contracts. As far as AKAP was concerned, Cynthia was the main source of knowledge about the contract with the Correo. For this reason, the first

³¹ Telephone conversation with Cynthia Houston 3.12.99. She is referring to the contract which was drawn up between the British Post Office and the Correo.

³² Cynthia Houston Knowledge Interview pre-interview meeting 19.1.00

interview session covered Cynthia's involvement with the scoping of the Project and contract negotiation.

The first Knowledge Interview session was cut short as Cynthia was pushed for time, but she offered to meet Andrew again if necessary. The interview recording was transcribed and a copy of the transcript was passed on to Cynthia. It was a month later before the second Knowledge Interview session occurred.³³ At the second interview session, Cynthia appeared sensitive to what she was prepared to say on tape: She wanted to establish what she was talking about before the tape recorder was switched on. As Cynthia is clearly someone who likes to talk, Andrew found it difficult to find an opportunity to switch the tape recorder on. When 45 minutes into the session Andrew finally switched on the recorder, and Cynthia's tone and coverage appeared to change instantly. After the recorder was switched off, the interview continued, and Cynthia appeared more relaxed again. She made a point about the AKAP Electronic Filing Cabinet, then qualified it by saying "I should have raised this with the tape on, because I don't have a problem with it."³⁴

Despite Andrew's intention to treat this as a Knowledge interview session - focusing particularly on Cynthia's knowledge of Human Resource and Knowledge Management issues in the Argentina Project - the session did not turn out like this. Cynthia was in control of the process and what she wanted to say. In all contact with Cynthia throughout the Knowledge Interview process, she had demonstrated 'political' sensitivity to the relationships between Post Office Consulting and BPCS. It was felt that this was a key factor in how she interacted with Andrew, whom she clearly treated as a member of Post Office Consulting.

The output of the Knowledge Interview was a 22 page transcript of the first Knowledge Interview session. The second session was not transcribed - it did not really work out as a

³³ Note that this second session occurred after the crucial End of Stage 2 Board meeting, where Cynthia had been with the AKAP Board for the first time

³⁴ Cynthia Houston, second Knowledge Interview meeting 24.2.00 - note on p.139 of fieldwork journal.

Knowledge Interview for the reasons described above. Andrew did not produce a case study of the interview. This was because Cynthia's narrative of her involvement in the project was quite readable, and of a reasonable enough length to stand on its own. It was felt that any effort to abstract this narrative would detract from its value.

6.3.3 David Orr: Knowledge Interview by Russell Bishop

David Orr was a Senior Delivery Consultant in Post Office Consulting. He had not been a long-term resident in Argentina, but his involvement with the Argentina Consultancy project had been significant and varied. This included help with the initial resourcing of the project team in recommending consultants, 2 short term visits to Argentina as a Delivery Consultant, and mentoring of some colleagues in his Practitioner Group working out in Argentina as long-term residents. Part of the reason for selecting David Orr for interview was on the basis of his having made several trips to Argentina and therefore perhaps had an interesting perspective on how the Argentina Consultancy Project was developed over time. The recommendation for selecting him on this basis came from Chris Arthur.³⁵

David was interviewed on 20 January for approximately 90 minutes. The outputs from the Knowledge Interview process are a 20 page interview transcript, and a 4-page summary entitled;

Case-study:

A unique perspective on an out of country postal management assignment

During his Knowledge Interview David said he had been very tired, having only just returned from a business trip to Australia. It is clear from this extract from the transcript that he was irritable and unclear of where the interview was going;³⁶

³⁵ Email from Chris Arthur to AKAP project team 23.11.99

³⁶ David Orr Knowledge Interview transcript p.16

R: Do you need a break for a few minutes?

D: Well, I was just getting to ... where else are we going with this?

R: Disengagement is the area I'd like to cover, disengagement.

D: What do you mean by that?

R: In terms of the project disengagement ... your perceptions of how this particular project planning process ... and so on ... for disengagement.

D: I don't mind talking about it. I'm just not sure I've got much to say.

As well as finding the number of little tape changes irritating, David also found the recording of the interview a barrier, feeling that it probably made him more circumspect in what he said.³⁷ Nevertheless, David still became "distinctly nervous" that what he had said could be taken as very critical of the way the Argentina Consultancy project was managed both in Argentina and by BPCS.³⁸ He feels that his comments would probably not be received in the constructive spirit in which they were given; "That's the way with learning points - they seem to be critical and not what they are."³⁹ David sought reassurances from Bob Field and Patricia Dalrymple that the outputs from his Knowledge Interview would not be made freely available, and with the absence of such a reassurance, he decided that it was safer to withdraw his Knowledge Interview material from the AKAP process. It was not used in the Analysis Meetings, and did not appear on the AKAP EFC. It was however, delivered to the Project Team who had commissioned it.

This email from David Orr signals his lack of willingness for outputs from his Knowledge Interview to be made available:⁴⁰

³⁷ David Orr interview 20.3.00 count 1/A 110

³⁸ David Orr interview 20.3.00 count 1/A 035

³⁹ David Orr interview 20.3.00 count 1/A 059

⁴⁰ Email from David Orr to Russell Bishop 3.3.00

“I have now read the transcript and the case study. I have also now been trained as a knowledge interviewer. However, reading the case study and then talking to Bob and Patricia who are heading the AKAP I am a bit concerned about who will get to see the case study and how it is used. You have recorded my impressions in the case study but it could come over (without any other explanation) as being quite critical and if certain quarters got hold of it then it would not be helpful to anyone as they are unlikely to view it constructively. At this moment I have no assurances that access to the case study will be limited. In these circumstances I have asked that, without such an assurance, the case study be withdrawn from the process. I am always willing to provide constructive learning but the case study is personalised and the impact comes from the way I was involved (e.g. as line manager of consultants out there) and if you were to de-personalise it then I think that the impact would be lost because it only means something in the context of my involvement.

There are a few accuracy or interpretation issues which I will drop you a note on in due course.

However I wanted to cover the main point as I think that there is a danger, if not used correctly, wrong use would also undermine the knowledge interview process.”

His outputs were therefore removed from the AKAP Electronic Filing Cabinet before it was handed over. All reference to David Orr was removed from the EFC. Despite this, David’s reticence was not because he does not believe in what AKAP was trying to achieve. Indeed, David stressed in his feedback interview that he thought the exercise was worth doing.⁴¹

From an objective reading of the Knowledge Interview transcript, David does not come across as particularly critical, and it is certainly mild compared to what some of the other Knowledge Interviewees said about the management of the consultancy project. However, it is clear from the coverage of the interview that there is very little about the work which David actually did on his two short-term assignments to Argentina, that is, his consultancy work around mail delivery. The interview focused almost entirely on what was going on in the Argentina Consultancy Project, particularly the people, management and leadership issues. It was about his longitudinal

⁴¹ David Orr interview 20.3.00 count 090

perspective as an outsider coming in at two points in the project and his perception of how it was developing.

This interview coverage will be explained in part because of how Russell was briefed by the AKAP team for the interview. He was told that David had been selected partly because of his perspective as a consultant who worked in Argentina for several short-term periods covering the span of the assignment, and also because he had been a mentor to some of the long-term residents. It is clear that Russell focused almost exclusively on these aspects of David's involvement, but did not really cover the consultancy work David conducted while he was in Argentina.

Russell's involvement as a Knowledge Interviewer stems from his general interest in and advocacy of the need for knowledge management, both as a practitioner and from an academic perspective.⁴² Russell was clearly very enthusiastic about Post Office Consulting's Knowledge Programme, and his motivation to practice the Knowledge Interview technique stemmed from a "simple sense of responsibility, as part of the KI community ... it's not like riding a bike , you have to keep exercising it."⁴³

Russell understood the purpose of the interview was to get "personal impressions."⁴⁴ However, in hindsight he felt that perhaps the focus was too much on the personal viewpoint, which led the interviewee to feel that the whole interview was quite negative.⁴⁵ When it came to writing the 'case-study' Russell claims to have agonised for several days over whether or not it should be personalised (that is, explicitly mention David's name) first writing it one way then the

⁴² Russell recently did an MBA dissertation on knowledge share within the Post Office

⁴³ Russell Bishop interview 27.3.00 count 1/A 470

⁴⁴ Russell Bishop interview 27.3.00 count 1/A 574

⁴⁵ Russell Bishop interview 27.3.00 count 1/A 010

next.⁴⁶ In the end, he felt that as the interview was about David's personal perspective, it would have lost impact to write it in the 3rd person.

Russell also understood that he was not asked to cover the technical areas of David's work as a Delivery Consultant, and if he had, then it would have been a completely different interview;

"The emphasis for me certainly wasn't on the technical issues ... if I had read into that that what we wanted was technical issues, then we would have had a completely differently structured interview."⁴⁷

How Russell interpreted what he was requested to do is particularly interesting. It was not the AKAP team's intention that he should ignore the technical aspect of David's work.

Nevertheless, Russell did what he understood he had been asked to do.

6.3.4 Jenny Bailey: Knowledge Interview by Andrea Campbell

Jenny Bailey went out to work in Argentina as a Transport/ Operations consultant, although this is not stated explicitly in any of her Knowledge Interview outputs. Andrea Campbell became involved in conducting Knowledge Interviews for AKAP, as she had recently joined Post Office Consulting and done some work with Teresa Singer on the Knowledge Interview training workshops. She was keen to be involved and develop her experience of Knowledge Interviews.

Andrea expressed unease at the very outset of the AKAP Knowledge Interview programme that

"we are not clear what is going to happen to the knowledge and how is it going to be used - the client should be telling us how the knowledge will be used, but the fact that he hasn't is a problem."⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Russell Bishop interview 27.3.00 count 1/B 027

⁴⁷ Russell Bishop interview 27.3.00 count 1/B 078

⁴⁸ Conversation with Andrea Campbell by telephone 22.12.99. Note on p.96 of fieldwork journal.

She also expressed concern that there is little guidance on how to approach the ‘analysis’ of the interview i.e. what form of case-study to generate from the interview transcript. These points were raised again by Andrea when giving feedback after the Knowledge Interviews had taken place - the client is “holding the purse strings, but he doesn’t have a vested enough interest in what comes out.”⁴⁹

As for the coverage of the interview, this was agreed by both participants at the outset:

A: Thanks for agreeing to the interview, Jenny, we will just go through the things that we were going to talk about again, the mail centre CTP design, Ops Management Structure Design, Transport Network Design and Containerisation. These were the topics that we thought we would focus on and we thought that the role of consultancy in Argentina should be discussed if all other aspects haven’t been covered or picked up elsewhere, basically. Is that how you remember discussing it before?

J: Yet it is.⁵⁰

In approaching the interview Andrea was clearly following the Knowledge Interview process as prescribed in the Knowledge Interview documentation. Indeed, at the AKAP End of Stage 2 meeting on 10.2.00, Teresa Singer (a developer of the Knowledge Interview technique) extolled the approach taken by Andrea Campbell to the Knowledge Interview, following the process as it had been designed and focusing on presenting technical knowledge in the cases.⁵¹ Her use of ‘topics’ to plan and manage the interview directly follows the Knowledge Interview procedures codified in the documentation. Her use of the terms ‘management of conversation’ and ‘cognitive recall’⁵² correspond directly to terms used in the Knowledge Interview documentation.

⁴⁹ Andrea Campbell interview 28.3.00 count 1/ 890

⁵⁰ Jenny Bailey Knowledge Interview transcript p.1

⁵¹ Note on p.122 of fieldwork journal.

⁵² Andrea Campbell interview 28.3.00 count 1/ 630

Both the Knowledge Interviews conducted by Andrea are certainly focused on the technical operations which her interviewees were involved with during their time in Argentina, and unusually so compared to the approaches of other AKAP Knowledge Interviewers. However, she stressed that this is not just her imposing her bias on the process, but it is also what Jenny wanted to cover: Andrea claims that in planning the interviews she gave Jenny the opportunity to say which areas of the AKAP Knowledge Map they wanted to cover, and both of them decided to go “down the operational route.”⁵³

However, Andrea did concede that, as Jenny had not been through a debriefing session on her return to the UK, she wanted to spend some time discussing the ‘domestic’ issues to do with the terms and conditions of their engagement overseas.⁵⁴ Despite this, Andrea decided not to put Jenny’s coverage of project management issues in the case-study. It is interesting to speculate on her reasons for leaving it out, particularly given Jenny’s keenness that she cover these issues in the interview.

It is clear from Jenny’s feedback on how the Knowledge Interview went, that her understanding of AKAP is that it *should* be about making improvements to the way the Post Office manages overseas assignments, particularly the people issues. However, Jenny was very cynical to what extent the business will take any notice: She claims that so far over the Argentina Consultancy Project, BPCS have had a “complete disregard for any feedback from any members of the team.”⁵⁵ She questioned the whole basis of AKAP by claiming that other interviewees “bear my cynicism that what’s the point of spending 2-3 hours talking to a tape recorder.”⁵⁶ Jenny recognised that there was a large element in her Knowledge Interview of her wanting to get things off her chest to do with the management of the Argentina project.

⁵³ Andrea Campbell interview 28.3.00 count 1/670

⁵⁴ Andrea Campbell interview 28.3.00 count 1/ 675

⁵⁵ Jenny Bailey interview 21.3.00 count 020

⁵⁶ Jenny Bailey interview 21.3.00 count 177

Thus, of the 13 pages of transcribed interview focusing on the first ‘topic’ of the Transport Network Design and Trandos (an integrated Mails Transport system), the latter 6 pages veer into issues of line management, controversy over the provision of language training and the consequent difficulties of not being able to work in Spanish, management of the Argentina Consultancy Project and people issues. In the interview Jenny demonstrates the depth of feeling over the way consultants were treated by the Post Office in Argentina, and the need to cover these issues in an interview led her and some of her former colleagues from Argentina to fear recriminations over taking part.⁵⁷

In this case the interviewer is clearly playing a dominant role in what is codified as the output of the Knowledge Interview. Jenny Bailey wanted her knowledge about management of the Argentina project to be captured in a formalised way, hence her decision to take part in the interview.⁵⁸ However, what Andrea chose to codify in the case-study of the interview did not include the management of the Argentina Consultancy Project, which Jenny clearly wanted captured.

When it came to producing a ‘case-study’ from the interview, Andrea was very apologetic that she had missed the original deadline, saying “she had not had much fun over the last few days with writing case-studies.”⁵⁹ It took her much longer than she expected. She attributed this in part to a weakness of the Knowledge Interview training in that it does properly define what constitutes a ‘case-study.’⁶⁰

It is clearly the case from the Knowledge Interview between Jenny Bailey and Andrea Campbell, that in order to conduct an interview with a technical focus, it is necessary for the interviewer to have technical knowledge of the subject matter in question. It would not be

⁵⁷ Jenny Bailey interview 21.3.00 count 022

⁵⁸ Jenny Bailey interview 21.3.00 count 020

⁵⁹ Telephone conversation with Andrea Campbell 7.2.00

⁶⁰ Andrea Campbell interview 28.3.00 count 1/ 679

possible to conduct an interview spanning over 6 pages of transcript on Trandos without some knowledge of what the system does. Also, the lack of a definition of Trandos, either in the interview or in the case-study, shows both familiarity with the subject matter on behalf of the interviewer, and also assumes familiarity on behalf of the reader. For people to understand the subject matter of a technically focused interview, it is reasonable to assume that they need to have similar knowledge.

6.3.5 Jim Cartwright: Knowledge Interview by Christine Connors

This Knowledge Interview is an interesting case in that both the interviewee, Jim Cartwright, and the interviewer, Christine Connors, when questioned afterwards, were of the opinion that the focus of the Knowledge Interview should have been more on the work Jim was doing in Argentina. The actual coverage of the interview was almost entirely about the welfare of Jim and his family during their time in Argentina. Jim and Christine's interpretation of what happened during the interview are interesting and can be contrasted.

It was Jim's understanding before the interview that Christine should have been focusing on 'operations.'⁶¹ By 'operations' this is understood to mean the work on postal operations which he was doing with the Correo. In previous interview cases this aspect of knowledge has been described as the 'technical' aspect to consultants' work. However, Jim did not think this coverage was possible given Christine's level of knowledge of his area of postal operations.⁶²

Christine's own understanding at the outset of her involvement with AKAP, was that the project was aiming to capture 'operational' aspects of the Argentina Consultancy Project, and that this came through from looking at the Knowledge Map.⁶³ However, she felt that Jim wanted to treat it as an opportunity to tell his side of the AKAP 'story' from beginning to end - she got the

⁶¹ Jim Cartwright interview 27.3.00 count 1/ 020

⁶² Jim Cartwright interview 27.3.00 count 1/ 110

⁶³ Christine Connors interview 10.4.00 count 1/ 190-200

impression that these were important things for Jim to say.⁶⁴ The Knowledge Interview was therefore planned for Jim to run through his involvement chronologically. This was also important so that his account made sense to Christine.⁶⁵

The resulting Knowledge Interview and ‘case-study’ clearly show this chronological and narrative approach. In the opening question of the interview, Christine indicates her intention to use this narrative approach to tease out the technical aspects to Jim’s knowledge of working in Argentina.⁶⁶

C: We need to concentrate on the operational technical area, but I would like first to get an idea of where you were when this started in terms of your career, and where you were living, and what started all of this for you.

Throughout the interview Christine asks many questions bringing Jim back to when certain things were happening. For example;

C: So the family came out in January? (p.14)

C: OK, right so we are in January. What kind of contact are you having in England now? (p.19)

C: So would the children have been in school at that point - was it a holiday time for the children? (p.20)

It transpires in the interview that there is a sub-text to this line of questioning and a taster for the coming story appears early in the interview. Here, Jim is talking about his wife’s disquiet that none of the benefits they had been offered to go out and work in Argentina were written into a contract;

⁶⁴ Christine Connors interview 10.4.00 count 1/ 405

⁶⁵ Christine Connors interview 10.4.00 count 1/ 425

⁶⁶ Jim Cartwright Knowledge Interview transcript p.1

J: ... I was saying, "don't worry your little head - the Post Office has already done right be me and they won't let me down in this venture." Those words came back to haunt me big time.⁶⁷

As the interviewer, Christine knows that in getting settled in Argentina, Jim and his family suffered something of an ordeal: First the interview covers the whole business of moving his family out to Argentina, finding suitable accommodation, getting his children settled into schools in Buenos Aires, having to balance off his need to work very hard with time to support his wife and children through this stressful time. Then Christine moves the interview into how he and his family had become finally settled. Then comes a whammy of Jim's sudden and early dismissal from the project and forced return to the UK. The narrative technique employed to bring the reader of the interview transcript generates the same sense of shock and surprise which Jim must have felt when asked to leave. Christine admits that this build up of the story up to Jim's sudden departure was completely planned.⁶⁸

The narrative approach was taken because Christine needed to become familiar with the historical details of the project and clearly needed to anchor this into the progression of the interview. This is an illustration of what can happen when the interviewer comes from outside the Argentina consultancy project community.

This point is further supported by Christine's observations about the need for an interviewer to have similar technical or 'operational' knowledge: After the interview, Christine reflected upon how her lack of technical knowledge of Jim's work hindered the interview. She felt that whereas Jim knows about domestic mail, Christine's technical knowledge is of international mail operations.⁶⁹ This is one of Christine's learning points which she sent in a memo to the AKAP project team following her experience of conducting the Knowledge Interview for AKAP:⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Jim Cartwright Knowledge Interview transcript p.4

⁶⁸ Christine Connors interview 10.4.00 count 1/ 424

⁶⁹ Christine Connors interview 10.4.00 count 1/ 335

⁷⁰ Email from Christine Connors

- People want to talk about their experience rather than technical aspects - specific questions are needed to pull out the technical details - suggest the interviewer is someone from interviewee's own technical area, so that context is understood

Christine's approach to writing a 'case-study' of the interview was to adopt the same narrative approach, starting;

"In the summer of 1997, Jim Cartwright was an Ops Programme Manager/ SOM in Peterborough, when he answered an advertisement in the Gazette looking for consultants for the Argentine Consultancy ...⁷¹"

Christine told the AKAP Project team that she was unsure about how to write a 'case-study' as the Knowledge Interview training had not prepared her for it.⁷² She tried to get hold of other AKAP case-studies which had already been written in order to use them as a benchmark for her own work.⁷³ However, this request was passed on to the Project Manager who refused to distribute outputs from other Knowledge Interviews due to confidentiality.⁷⁴ This flummoxed her as she simply wanted to look at how the other interviewers had gone about writing their 'case-studies' and was keen to learn from what they had been doing.⁷⁵

6.3.6 *Judy Kirkwood: Knowledge Interview by Andrea Campbell*

When initially asked to participate in a Knowledge Interview, Judy Kirkwood replied "Do I have a choice ... what would happen if I didn't? Phones would start ringing."⁷⁶ Although she later said that she was joking, there is nevertheless an underlying sense of obligation underpinning her involvement in the interview. Andrea Campbell was keen to interview Judy,

⁷¹ 'Case study from Knowledge Interview with Jim Cartwright' Christine Connors, 15.2.00

⁷² Christine Connors interview 10.4.00 count 1/ 280

⁷³ Email from Christine Connors 12.1.00

⁷⁴ Email from Patricia Dalrymple to Teresa Singer 20.3.00

⁷⁵ Christine Connors interview 10.4.00 count 1/ 275

⁷⁶ Telephone conversation with Judy Kirkwood 3.12.99

because she knew her from having previously worked in the same Royal Mail Leeds office, and also because of their physical proximity.⁷⁷ Andrea's concern early in AKAP that there was no clear remit on what the client wanted from the interview, was shown in the case of her Knowledge Interview with Jenny Bailey.

The Knowledge Interview took place over 2 sessions on January 5 and January 10 2000, amounting to 75 pages of transcript. There were 4 separate case-studies generated by Andrea Campbell from this interview, all of them depersonalised, that is, presented without reference to Judy. The four are entitled;

- Delivery Franchising in Argentina: A case study
- Correo Delivery Specifications: A case study
- Correo Workload Assessment: A case study
- Correo Office Revisions: A case study

The decision to produce separate case-studies purely focusing on Judy's work with the Correo was a decision reached by both interviewer and interviewee. Judy felt that enough had already been said around the people and project management issues of the Argentina Consultancy Project, and did not want to go over this again in the Knowledge Interview.⁷⁸ Andrea clearly had more success keeping this interview focused on her technical knowledge, compared with her experience with Jenny Bailey. Judy shows no inclination to steer the interview towards the way the Argentina Consultancy Project was run or how they were treated.

The transcript from Judy Kirkwood's Knowledge Interview is a good example of the important role of the transcriber in affecting the readability of the interview output. It is not until page 5 that the transcriber decides to indicate who is talking, interviewer or interviewee. Until that

⁷⁷ Andrea Campbell email to Judy Kirkwood 8.12.99

⁷⁸ Andrea Campbell email to AKAP project team 7.2.00

point, the transcript is one piece of text and it is very difficult to work out which are the questions, and which are the interviewee's answers.

6.3.7 Nigel Hale: Knowledge Interview by Fran Heath

Nigel worked as a Counters Retail Consultant for the Correo in Argentina for 11 months from July 97 to June 98. Nigel was one of the group of six people who went out to Argentina to initially scope up the project after the bid had been accepted. His main responsibility was consultative, providing advice on the direction the Correo should take in the counters retail area.

Early on in AKAP, Chris Arthur attempted to intervene over whether or not Nigel Hale should be interviewed. Patricia related to the project team Chris' request to her that Nigel should not be interviewed, as his "judgement may be clouded by repatriation issues."⁷⁹ As a result, Patricia decided that he should definitely be interviewed. This is another example of how Patricia construed Chris Arthur as trying to control what came out of AKAP.

Nigel was interviewed by Fran Heath for AKAP on February 1 2000 at his home over the course of 3 ½ hours. Fran felt this was a bit long, and that being at his home made it a bit laid back and not business oriented.⁸⁰ Due to the AKAP time pressures to complete the interviews, it was agreed that Fran, a trained typist, would transcribe her own interview, which she describes as a 'waste of Band 9 time' even though the resulting transcript was high quality.⁸¹

Nigel had been involved early on in AKAP, as a participant in the original brainstorming meeting. It was clear then that he was keen for the project to address the problems with

⁷⁹ Patricia Dalrymple reported at an AKAP Knowledge Map meeting between herself, Polly Johnson and Andrew Church 22.10.99 - note on p.72 of fieldwork journal

⁸⁰ Fran Heath interview 17.3.00 count 1/A 095

⁸¹ Fran Heath interview 17.3.00 count 1/A 125.

management of the Argentina project.⁸² Indeed his participation at the initial AKAP meeting was to ensure “that the opinions of colleagues were heard and listened to” and in order to act on the impression he had that Chris Arthur would try to steer the meeting.⁸³ Nigel also talked about his concern that Chris Arthur would attempt to manipulate the knowledge capture project.⁸⁴

In terms of the project management issues of the Argentina Consultancy Project, his expectation was not that AKAP would do something about this because these issues had been aired during and since his time in Argentina. Instead he saw such project management issues as an important backdrop to his work in Argentina, and he felt that he could not cover the technical nature of his work without giving this important context.⁸⁵ Nigel was very happy with the balance and coverage of the interview. His overall view of AKAP was as a “one stop shop for a potted history” [of the Argentina Consultancy Project]⁸⁶ which might assist others going out to Argentina who wish to familiarise themselves with the consultancy project.

Fran’s motivation for conducting a Knowledge Interview was to gain some experience of Knowledge Interviewing, and also to find out more about the Post Office’s work in Argentina.⁸⁷ Following the interview, Fran was clearly able to talk knowledgeably about the Argentina Consultancy Project, so it would appear that she had fulfilled her objective of learning more about the Post Office’s work out there.

The transcript of the interview very much tells the story of what happened to Nigel when he went out to Argentina and how he worked with other people when he was out there. This was another case of the narrative style being adopted. The ‘case-study’ reflects the narrative directly, albeit grouped within headings similar to the Knowledge Map. The interview follows a general

⁸² Nigel Hale observed at the AKAP brainstorm meeting 28.7.99

⁸³ Nigel Hale interview 13.4.00 notes p.1

⁸⁴ Nigel Hale interview 13.4.00 notes p.1

⁸⁵ Nigel Hale interview 13.4.00 notes p.1

⁸⁶ Nigel Hale interview 13.4.00 notes p.1

⁸⁷ Fran Heath interview 17.3.00 count 1/A 038

theme of what went wrong with the project, a main topic of focus being the issue of housing which dogged his family during their time in Argentina, his unexpected early repatriation, and his perception of the poor leadership of the project. The content of what technical knowledge Nigel applied and developed during his work in Argentina was covered in the last few pages of the transcript. Nigel felt afterwards that the balance between people/ project management issues and the technical content of the interview was fine.⁸⁸ Nigel felt that it was not possible to talk about the work he did for the Correo, without covering the context in which he was working - “they’re so tightly linked, it’s not true.”⁸⁹

Fran was of the opinion that technical aspects are difficult to cover in Knowledge Interviews if you have little subject knowledge. She made the point that in selection interviews, technical aspects of the work are always covered by someone who has knowledge of the area.⁹⁰ In her case, for example, she had no idea what Nigel was talking about when he was “getting technical over electronic point of sale stuff.”⁹¹ If we were serious about tapping into Nigel’s technical knowledge, she argued, we would not simply look at Argentina in isolation, but relate it to the wider context of Nigel’s work.⁹²

Fran claimed to have found the Knowledge Map useful - her interpretation of what AKAP wanted was to cover all areas of the Map.⁹³ In her approach to the interview, she had “tried to be client facing to the Knowledge Map as far as possible.”⁹⁴ Fran said she could have done more to extract Nigel’s technical knowledge of retail consultancy, but this aspect was only one part of the Map, and she understood AKAP’s remit to be about Nigel contributing his knowledge of all aspects of the Argentina Consultancy Project.⁹⁵

⁸⁸ Nigel Hale interview 13.4.00 notes p.2

⁸⁹ Nigel Hale interview 13.4.00 notes p.1

⁹⁰ Telephone conversation with Fran Heath 4.2.00

⁹¹ Fran Heath interview 17.3.00 count 1/A 410

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Fran Heath interview 17.3.00 count 1/A 045.

⁹⁴ Telephone conversation with Fran Heath 4.2.00

⁹⁵ Fran Heath interview 17.3.00 count 1/A 035

Fran saw the ‘case-study’ as a document which brings out particular experiences of note, learning points and suggestions for improvements, and knowledge that could be shared in order to improve the process of conducting consultancy overseas.⁹⁶ She felt she had little guidance from what the AKAP team wanted to see from the case study, and it would have helped if the client had appeared to know.⁹⁷ Fran did not agonise over whether or not to depersonalise the case study. In her opinion this is not possible in a Knowledge Interview - “if you are drawing out the tacit knowledge, then the personal approach has to come in - if it’s knowledge in someone’s head, then that is personal.”⁹⁸

Nigel made some amendments to the original case-study written by Fran. He requested a piece to be removed which denigrates someone in BPCS who he still has to work with,⁹⁹ and indeed, relies upon to do overseas consultancy work. It is, however, interesting to note that he was happy for the case-study to denigrate explicitly the leadership qualities of Chris Arthur, someone who he no longer has any dealings with.

In this following extract from an email, Nigel shows his nervousness at certain people reading what he said in his Knowledge Interview:¹⁰⁰

“I am happy for the project team to use the document that I agreed with Fran. However, before it is passed to Carol and Cynthia at the end of March, I would probably want to take out some of the personal references made about certain people. I’m sorry if this seems a little paranoid but to be honest, it is hard not to be paranoid about Argentina as you will no doubt have picked up from the interview results! I still have a close relationship with BPCS and knowing them as I do, they don’t take kindly to criticism.”

⁹⁶ Fran Heath interview 17.3.00 count 1/A 150

⁹⁷ *ibid.*

⁹⁸ Fran Heath interview 17.3.00 count 1/A 275

⁹⁹ Nigel Hale email to Fran Heath 15.2.00

¹⁰⁰ Email from Nigel Hale 29.2.00

This email sent before finalising his Knowledge Interview outputs for inclusion in the AKAP Electronic Filing Cabinet shows Nigel's continued concern over some of his comments in the interview being read by others.

“With regard to the transcripts and the case studies being held on the database controlled by Carol, could you clarify (or ask Andrew to) what is meant by confidentiality. Who exactly will have access to these? I would not want Chris to be able to look at these for example as there are one or two personal quotes, that whilst not wanting to distance myself from, are not necessarily for his sight.”

There were no further changes to the case-study following those made by Nigel at the time of this email. The case-study then went onto the Electronic Filing Cabinet in this form, so despite the reticence expressed by Nigel in this email about Chris reading this case-study, his concerns were not heeded. Following Nigel's direct request to Patricia Dalrymple and Amy Chan, the actual transcript from his Knowledge Interview was not put on the Electronic Filing Cabinet. This was also due to his concern about people in BPCS reading it.

In terms of the interview process 'unlocking' knowledge he had not previously articulated - the so-called 'tacit' knowledge talked about in the Knowledge Interview literature - Nigel was emphatic that nothing new came out in the interview. Since he left Argentina, he has discussed what happened to him there “hundreds and thousands of times.” With this opportunity “it was nice to get the opportunity to tell the story from start to finish”¹⁰¹ particularly as he considered the debrief upon his return to be inadequate. However, Nigel considered the timing of AKAP, nearly 2 years after his return to the UK, to be a limitation to the usefulness of what can be captured and also a barrier to what he could remember.¹⁰²

¹⁰¹ Nigel Hale interview 13.4.00 notes p.2

¹⁰² Nigel Hale interview 13.4.00 notes p.1

6.3.8 *Rick Donaldson: Knowledge Interview by Polly Johnson*

Rick worked in Argentina as a Process Planning Strategy Consultant between 1997 and 2000.

During that time he managed a project to build from scratch a new Mail Processing Centre, which took an unprecedented 14 months to complete.

Rick Donaldson was interviewed by Polly Johnson for AKAP on December 30 1999 at his home in Edinburgh whilst he was on leave from Argentina. The interview generated a transcript of 44 pages. Polly had to cut short the interview because the heating in Rick's flat had broken and she was getting very cold. Polly did not know Rick before the interview, but says they quickly clicked as they are both Scottish, and also Rick warmed to her because they had both worked in Buenos Aires. Polly's motivation for conducting an interview for AKAP was to gain practical experience of the technique once she had undergone the Knowledge Interview training workshop in early December 1999.¹⁰³

Rick's Knowledge Transfer report helped Polly to focus on his work on the Buenos Aires Mail Processing Centre as a topic for the interview. However, Rick also asked if he cover the areas of working in the Correo line, and the issue of Spanish lessons.¹⁰⁴ Rick actively chose not to cover the management and leadership of the Consultancy Project as a subject worth capturing. Rick was keen to point out that he did not wish to add to the criticism widely expressed about Chris Arthur, who he feels may have been treated unfairly by the others.¹⁰⁵ It is fair to say that Chris' needs in Argentina were simpler than those of the consultants bringing families, and therefore he was more content with his work package. Also the tangible nature of building a Mail Centre meant that he did not have to deal with as much ambiguity over his work as some of the consultants working in less clearly defined areas, for example, the work on cultural change done by Rodney Wallis.

¹⁰³ Email from Polly Johnson 3.12.99

¹⁰⁴ Polly Johnson interview 16.3.00 count 1/A 465

¹⁰⁵ Rick Donaldson interview 27.3.00 p.160 of fieldwork journal

However, when it came to the interview Polly found that Rick saw little point in discussing the building of the Buenos Aires Mail Centre, because Polly did not have the technical knowledge necessary in order to conduct an interview around it.¹⁰⁶ Rick made this point when questioned about his interview afterwards. He said that Polly did not appear focused on what she wanted to get out of the interview. Ideally she would have had more knowledge of what he was doing out in Argentina in an operational sense. In that way she would have known where to push in certain areas. If the interview needed to be more technically oriented, Rick would have preferred to see two interviewers, one with better technical knowledge of his area of work.¹⁰⁷ Polly was also hindered by a lack of basic jargon related to postal operations, for example, at one point in the interview Rick had to explain to Polly what ‘flats’ are.¹⁰⁸

Polly had real difficulties knowing how to construct a ‘case-study’ from the interview. On the day of the deadline for sending out stuff in preparation for the Analysis meeting, Polly posted this entry on TeamWeb under the heading ‘Rick’s Case Study’:

“It’s now 8.15 on Friday evening and I’m going home - I hate to admit it, but I can’t make the deadline - I’m struggling with it, and am sure there’s probably some nice systematic way of doing it that eludes me. Any advice, tips are welcome ...”

She also complained about the number of hours spent slogging over it; “it was ridiculous, it took a full 8 or 9 hours just to read the transcript.”¹⁰⁹ She ultimately decided to construct the case-studies from headings on the Knowledge Map. Even though she did not set out to do this, the case-studies seemed to fit in quite nicely with areas of the Map.¹¹⁰ Polly agonised over whether

¹⁰⁶ Comment made by Polly Johnson at AKAP 1st Analysis Meeting 8.2.00 - note on p.111 of fieldwork journal.

¹⁰⁷ Rick Donaldson interview 27.3.00 p.161 of fieldwork journal

¹⁰⁸ Polly Johnson interview 16.3.00 count 1/B 455. ‘Flats’ is a basic piece of Royal Mail terminology which refers to letters in large (flat) envelopes, as opposed to parcels which have to be treated differently.

¹⁰⁹ Polly Johnson interview 16.3.00 count 2/A 029

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

the case-studies should be personal or depersonalised, and after much deliberation she decided to make it personal - ultimately she felt that the value of the Knowledge Interview is in knowing who the subject is; “as soon as you start changing someone’s words, you put in too much of your own interpretation.”¹¹¹

6.3.9 *Rodney Wallis: Knowledge Interview by Andrew Church*

Rodney Wallis worked in Argentina as a Process Measurement and Culture Change Consultant between November 1997 and July 1999.

The interview took place over 3 sessions in September and October 1999, which yielded approximately 6 hours of tape recordings, amounting to 128 pages of transcribed text. This interview occurred before the AKAP Project was officially initiated, and before the AKAP Knowledge Map was codified. There was an urgency for the interview to be conducted as Rodney was briefly in the country before setting off on his next consultancy posting to South Africa. Andrew was available at short notice to conduct the interview.

A Pre-Interview session was held in the morning of the first interview. The documentation supporting the Knowledge Interview technique gives a template for this Pre-Interview session, in which the interviewee is prompted to mention particular successes, positive experiences, negative experiences. This type of language was uncomfortable and emotive for Rodney. His Argentina ‘experience’ was often a stressful, frustrating and unhappy time. For example, a Reorganisation Project which Rodney talked about as one of his main successes, involved very long hours working alone over a sustained period, yet the report he produced was not implemented. It was therefore not relevant to talk about success in terms of actually implementing any change, and this was typical of the work he did during his time in Argentina.

¹¹¹ Polly Johnson interview 16.3.00 count 2/A 085

As a result of his experiences, he was quite happy to leave Argentina, working 19 months of his two year contract. In the interview he wonders why he stuck it out for so long. The reasons for his frustration were largely to do with the Post Office management of the project and his relationship with the Argentinean client. These issues were discussed at length in the interview sessions.

The interview divided into two main parts. The first covered the background to his involvement in Argentina, his experience of working as a consultant overseas and the context in which this work was done. This was important background for Andrew who had no prior knowledge of the Argentina Consultancy Project, and therefore had to familiarising himself with the context of Rodney's work. The second part focused on the application and development of Rodney's technical knowledge while he was there. Rodney supplied Handover Reports before the interview which described the projects he worked on in Argentina, that is, the context within which his technical knowledge was applied.

Rodney and Andrew both decided that if the interview was aiming to capture aspects of his technical knowledge, the interview would have to be approached on a project-by-project basis, basing the discussion around the Handover Reports. Andrew's inclination was to get Rodney to pick out 2 or 3 key projects, but Rodney was insistent that if they were to cover his technical knowledge comprehensively, then it would be necessary to look at all of his projects (about a dozen). Clearly this was going to take some time, so it was decided to split the interview session, and hence to cover the technical work he did in Argentina in the second, and subsequently third, sessions. This approach resulted in a very long interview which consequently meant the subsequent stage of producing a summary was very long too.

During the interview, Rodney pulled no punches over his criticism of Chris Arthur. This extract from the Knowledge Interview transcript shows how Rodney actively wanted to air his misgivings over the leadership of the Argentina Consultancy Project. The extract picks up after

Rodney has been talking about the way Chris Arthur conducted himself in his managerial role;¹¹²

A: OK, so aside from the role, is there also a personality thing here?

R: Oh yeah, there's a huge personality thing, if you want to get on to that?

A: Well, no ... I don't want to get on to that.

R: Maybe we should get on to it.

A: Well, if you think it is important to air it, yes.

This extract shows how Rodney steered the topic of conversation towards an issue which he clearly felt important to capture.

When it came to asking Rodney if he was happy for his interview transcript to go on the AKAP EFC, Rodney agreed providing he could spend some time taking out anything sensitive he had said. However, he was only willing to do this work as long as it was chargeable. Patricia agreed that he could charge this time to AKAP.¹¹³

The 128 page interview was transcribed by temps from an external agency. They clearly did not enjoy the work and made a very poor job of it. Two of them left before completing the work, the second leaving large chunks of text out. The quality of the transcription was poor, with many blanks and little attention paid to punctuation. The sense of the interview in many places is difficult to follow. It took a full day to read through the transcript alone. This was the first Knowledge Interview conducted for AKAP. Later recordings were sent for transcription within Post Office Consulting to a team in Swindon which charged for their time. The quality of these transcripts was much higher. This illustrates how the transcribers - effectively codifiers of the text - played a crucial role in affecting the usability of the text. There is also an issue to do with their familiarity with key terminology and basic details of the organisation. An interesting

¹¹² Rodney Wallis Knowledge Interview transcript p.23

¹¹³ see email to Rodney Wallis 26.3.00

example was seen on the first page of Rodney Wallis' Knowledge Interview transcript when it was returned from the temp - Post Office Consulting appeared as 'First Office Consulting,' a mistake which presumably no one familiar with the organisation would have made.

6.3.10 Sandy Buxton: Knowledge Interview by Martin Healey

Sandy went out to Argentina in October 1997 initially on a short-term assignment to do work on mapping quality processes. She stayed for a further 12 months, working in customer services.

Martin's motivation for conducting interviews for AKAP was not only to gain further experience of Knowledge Interviewing, but also to secure paid work. He was keen to conduct as many interviews as possible. When told in response to his question that this is chargeable work, he replied 'oh good.'¹¹⁴ In several telephone conversations he stressed his availability and keenness to conduct Knowledge Interviews. It was clear from one of his later comments that he found it difficult to find chargeable consultancy work, so earning money for his Practitioner Group is an important motivation for taking part in AKAP.¹¹⁵

The coverage of the interview was entirely about what Sandy describes as the 'domestic' issues of the Argentina Consultancy Project - recruitment, cultural issues, working environment, family welfare, and repatriation. Sandy believed these were important to raise because in her opinion, they took over the whole project.¹¹⁶ For Sandy, an exercise such as AKAP should be about "being more effective when doing this type of role and representing the company."¹¹⁷

¹¹⁴ Telephone conversation with Martin Healey 12.1.00

¹¹⁵ Martin Healey interview 27.3.00 count 1/A 060

¹¹⁶ Sandy Buxton feedback interview 12.4.00 notes p.1

¹¹⁷ Sandy Buxton feedback interview 12.4.00 notes p.2

Sandy was happy for the Knowledge Interview outputs to go on the AKAP Electronic Filing Cabinet, and had no reservations about BPCS reading what she said, which she saw as constructive criticism and an improvement opportunity.¹¹⁸

Martin tried to follow the Knowledge Interview process given in the documentation for the Knowledge Interview technique, but it took him several days to go through it. He felt that the Knowledge Interview material was shrouded in “intellectualism” which he felt got in the way of planning the interview.¹¹⁹

Martin feels that his lack of familiarity with the Argentina Consultancy Project used up interview time. He felt he could have done more to become familiar with details of Sandy’s work beforehand. Martin described the AKAP briefing as so vague, and the interview was a “big, vague tell me about it.”¹²⁰ He did not feel that the AKAP Knowledge Map added much to the picture.

During the interview, Martin had problems with the recording equipment. This meant that in the recording Sandy’s voice could hardly be heard. The transcriber had problems capturing all the conversation. Martin said the problem was mitigated because he had kept notes and could fill in the major gaps.¹²¹ However, Martin did not fill in the gaps on the transcript itself. Thus the readability of the interview transcript was limited.

Martin found that he was not at all clear on how to write a ‘case-study’, never having produced one in the Knowledge Interviews he had conducted in the past.¹²² He attributed this difficulty to being unclear about the next steps in AKAP, and how the case-study would be used.¹²³

¹¹⁸ Sandy Buxton feedback interview 12.4.00 notes p.2

¹¹⁹ Martin Healey interview 27.3.00 count 1/A 240

¹²⁰ Martin Healey interview 27.3.00 count 1/A 314

¹²¹ Martin Healey interview 27.3.00 count 1/A 385

¹²² Martin Healey interview 27.3.00 count 1/A 450

¹²³ Telephone conversation with Martin Healey 3.2.00

6.3.11 Synopsis of findings from Knowledge Interview cases

This section provides a synopsis of the main issues related to knowledge codification which have emerged from the Knowledge Interview cases.

The Knowledge Interview technique was applied in many varied ways. Different interviewers had different approaches. Some interviewers were trying hard to follow the process for the Knowledge Interview prescribed in the Knowledge Interview documentation, others followed the prescribed process to varying degrees. There was also lack of clarity among many interviewers about what they were doing it for, who was going to be using the codified knowledge and how they were going to use it. The interviewers appeared happier with the interview, and less happy when it came to abstracting the key parts of the interview into a 'case-study' for an imaginary audience. Overall there appeared to be no cohesion created by the project among this group of Knowledge Interviewers over what they were supposed to be doing and why. It was clear in many cases that they had reached their own understandings of what was required of them.

The role of the interviewer - as an individual brought in to broker the codification of another individual's knowledge - is critical. The approach adopted to the process, and the questions asked, fundamentally affect what is codified as the interviewee's knowledge. In some cases the interviewee was more in control over the interview process, and thus set more of the agenda of what was codified. When the interview is further distilled into a summarised 'case-study', what is codified as the interviewee's knowledge in the 'case-study' depends upon what the interviewer brings out. Their interpretation of what the interviewer said, and their judgement of what should and should not be highlighted, inevitably means that the interviewer's knowledge is

also codified into the ‘case-study.’ It is, after all, the interviewer who performs this part of the codification process.

In the Knowledge Interview cases, there were cases of interviewers being unfamiliar with the subject matter, and this affected what knowledge the interviewer could enable the interviewee to codify within the interview dynamic. There are different types of familiarity on the part of the interviewer which affected the knowledge codification process;

- lack of knowledge of the Argentina Consultancy Project, leading many interviewers to spend a considerable amount of interview time familiarising themselves with what went on there
- lack of ‘technical’ or ‘operational’ knowledge of the type of work performed by the interviewee creating a barrier to the interviewer’s ability to ask appropriate questions
- lack of knowledge of the terminology used or Post Office jargon, hindering the ability of participants to talk about these things meaningfully. This was seen similarly with the interview transcribers whose lack of familiarity with Post Office terms affected their codification of the interview transcript.

It was also interesting to see a ‘typology of knowledge’ emerging in how participants interpreted what type of knowledge was being captured in their individual interviews. The Knowledge Map had already started a process of segmenting ‘areas’ of knowledge which the interviews could focus on. In the interviews an apparent dichotomy emerged between;

- whether the Knowledge Interviews should be covering the ‘technical’ or ‘operational’ aspects of the interviewee’s knowledge, in terms of how their knowledge was applied and developed in the work they performed for the Correo
- or whether the Knowledge Interview should be focusing on the management and leadership of the Argentina Consultancy Project and the treatment and welfare of consultants while they were there. In some cases this was described as the ‘domestic’ and ‘people’ issues.

In some cases it was decided that the two 'types of knowledge' go hand in hand and could not be divorced from each other.

The motivations of the individuals to participate in AKAP also had a significant affect on what knowledge was codified, and who they were willing to grant access to their codified knowledge. For some interviewees there was a clear need to 'get things off their chests' over what they perceived to be problems with the management of the Argentina Consultancy Project which affected them while they were working there. Some did not wish to air their grievances, preferring to concentrate more on the work they did.

For the interviewers, all were treating this as an opportunity to gain experience of Knowledge Interviewing, and some welcomed the opportunity to accept chargeable work. All had been trained as Knowledge Interviewers within the previous nine months, and were happy of the experience of applying the technique in a real project, rather than a 'practice' environment.

The production of 'case-studies' from the interviews caused particular problems for the interviewers. They were required to perform a critical role in how to further codify the knowledge codified in the interview transcript, yet they had little sense of the case-study's context of use. As AKAP had not been able to get the Project Board to define precisely who the audiences were, what knowledge they required, and what form it should be deployed to them in, the Project Team were therefore not able to enlighten the interviewers. Remember that two members of the project team were interviewers, and they themselves had problems knowing who the case-study was being codified for.

The issue of whether to keep the case-studies personal, or to depersonalise the case-study, was a particular problem for some of the interviewers. Some felt that the knowledge presented in the

case-study could stand on its own, while others felt that to remove reference to whose knowledge was codified was counter-intuitive to the Knowledge Interview process.

Some of the interviewers attributed their difficulty with producing the case-studies as a limitation of the Knowledge Interview training. This is described in the Knowledge Interview documentation as the process of 'analysis' which occurs after the interview has been conducted. However, the 'analysis' stage was seen as a shortcoming of the Knowledge Interview training workshop and insufficient attention was given to what happens at this stage. The 'case-study' is described in the Knowledge Interview documentation as a possible output of the 'analysis' process, but there is no guidance given on how to produce one.

Another group of individuals, who played an important part in what was codified from the Knowledge Interviews, are the transcribers. The importance of their role appeared to be neglected by AKAP. The quality of their job in transcribing is fundamental to the readability and comprehensibility of the transcript. There are places in the transcripts where the sense is completely lost, and could only be regained by returning to the tape recordings. It was also interesting that the difference between the job performed by transcribers from inside and outside the organisation was marked. Those from inside the Post Office were more familiar with Post Office terminology. In one interviewer's case, the accuracy and quality of the transcript was assured by doing the transcribing herself.

The conclusions brought out above have all related to the nature, role and interaction of the individual participants. There were also other physical and temporal factors which affected the knowledge codification process. For example, one interview was 'a bit laid back' because it was at home, and one was cut short because the heating was not working and it was too cold to continue. These were constraints related to the physical environment. Another interview was hampered by problems with the recording equipment. This was a constraint related to the technical infrastructure. Some interviewees felt that the interview occurred too long after the

event for them to recollect what they did, and some felt that this was occurring too long after the event to make the codification of their knowledge useful. This is a constraint related to context of time.

6.4 Concluding section

This chapter has presented cases of knowledge codification occurring within AKAP at an individual level. These are detailed case-studies of individuals acting in a social and organisational context. The behaviour of participants and their motivation to participate in the process of codifying knowledge is clearly influenced by their relationships with other people; both in their relationships with participants directly involved in the codification process, and in their relationships with other people in the different organisations of the Post Office.¹²⁴

It had already been shown in Chapter 5 that there was a ‘political’ dimension to AKAP, in the sense that it brought together conflicting organisations and stakeholders within the Post Office group, particularly Post Office Consulting and BPCS. The AKAP Project Manager was clearly influenced by what she perceived as ‘politics’ in AKAP, which particularly influenced her behaviour towards the head of the Argentina Consultancy Project. Hence someone with key knowledge of the Correo’s operations was pushed aside by AKAP. His first-hand knowledge of the Consultancy Project, codified in a detailed Knowledge Map, was neglected in favour of a summarised and decontextualised version. In the AKAP Knowledge Interviews, there were also clearly cases where the relationships between these individuals in an organisational context affected what knowledge they were willing to codify (i.e. actually to say in the interview) and which parts of their codified knowledge they were prepared to hand over to the project. One member of BPCS was not prepared to codify her knowledge for Post Office Consulting claiming that her knowledge ‘belongs properly’ to Post Office International. Thus it would appear that this tension between competing organisations in the Post Office Group made

¹²⁴ The term ‘behaviour’ is used in a sociological not a psychological sense.

AKAP's objective of knowledge management much harder. These themes are developed further in Chapter 8.

In the Knowledge Interview cases the willingness of some participants to share their knowledge was clearly influenced by who would have access to the codified product. In AKAP it was proposed to place their codified knowledge on an electronic database. The possibility of other people gaining access to these documents led some individuals to ask for their codified knowledge not to be made available.

Who would have access to the codified product, was a very different question to who the knowledge was being codified for. The Knowledge Map was intended to kick start a process of defining precisely who this knowledge was being captured for, that is, to identify precisely which audiences the knowledge would be deployed to. In this way, the project would know what their 'needs' were. It was clear that no one was making these decisions. As for the Knowledge Map, it did not set out to define these audiences first. The detailed Knowledge Map was codified by an individual who was codifying his own knowledge for his own use, that is, in order to assist in collecting existing documentation around these areas. Therefore, he knew who he was codifying the Map for, even if the Project Team had a different use in mind. As for who the Knowledge Interviews were being codified for, this was not at all clear. The interviewers tended to adopt their own style for the interview depending upon what they believed the process to be about. However, when it came to abstracting and summarising knowledge from the transcript into a 'case-study,' they had difficulties knowing who the case-study was being codified for, and how they would use it.

In both the codification of the Knowledge Map and the codification of the Knowledge Interviews, there were individuals involved in what was described in Chapter 5 as 'primary level' codification, and there were individuals who acted upon this knowledge at a 'secondary level.' Thus in the Knowledge Map, the knowledge originally codified by the consultants from

Argentina was modified by the involvement of other individuals in the Project Team and Project Board. In the Knowledge Interviews, the knowledge codified by the interviewee was modified at a secondary level when the interviewer summarised the transcript into a case study. This highlights an important role played by the people who codify primary knowledge at a secondary level. The AKAP approach to knowledge management was predicated on the involvement of such 'brokers' or 'intermediaries.' It has been suggested from these cases that when knowledge is codified at a secondary level, it is no longer just the knowledge codified at a primary level by the originating 'knower.' It would appear that the knowledge of the individuals at the secondary level also becomes codified in the process.

Within the codification processes presented in this chapter, the intermediary or broker's knowledge and their familiarity with the knowledge of the primary knower is key. In the AKAP Knowledge Map, individuals with little or no knowledge of the Argentina Consultancy Project abstracted and decontextualised the detailed Map which had been codified at a primary level. This resulted in a one-page of summary of 'all' the potential knowledge from Argentina giving equal weight to the different areas or fields of knowledge. In the Knowledge Interviews, the knowledge of the interviewer was a critical factor in which aspects of the interviewee's 'technical' or 'operational' knowledge could be codified. The interviewer's knowledge also affected what was codified in the 'case-studies.'

It was also interesting in these cases to see typologies of knowledge being used. The Knowledge Map, in effect, was a form of code using words to segment and categorise areas of knowledge which people have about the Argentina Consultancy Project. Some of these were clearly used in the Knowledge Interview cases, for example, 'people issues', 'project management', 'technical', 'operational.' This typology or code also emerged as a way of talking about which aspects of the interviewee's knowledge could be codified in the Knowledge Interview process. The individual Knowledge Interview cases showed that common understandings of the meaning of these terms, and which aspects of knowledge AKAP wanted to codify, were often not sought or

reached. The use of such a typology follows through into the cases of knowledge codification presented in the following chapter.

The thesis will now go on to examine how the knowledge of individuals codified in this chapter was further processed in the AKAP project. Knowledge codification is now examined occurring within a context of formal groups brought together specifically to effect the task of knowledge management.

CHAPTER 7: CODIFICATION OF KNOWLEDGE IN FORMAL GROUPS

7.1 Introduction

The previous chapter presented cases which illustrate the codification of knowledge at an individual level and between individuals. Essentially the AKAP approach to knowledge management was to capture and codify the knowledge of individuals, and to broker the movement of this knowledge to other parts of the Post Office.

Chapter 6 began to show how a range of social, organisational and environmental contexts affected the behaviour of participants in the knowledge codification process. It found that their relationships with other people are key to what knowledge is codified, and that in an organisational context, the nature of these relationships can make the process of knowledge management more difficult.

This chapter examines processes of knowledge codification occurring within a formal group context. Formal groups are the main principle of managing most organisations, and the governing framework within which individuals relate to each other within the organisation.

AKAP's approach to knowledge management was no exception - the AKAP project was formally constituted with its principle groups, the AKAP Project Team and the AKAP Project Board.

Formal groups are defined in this thesis as groups which are formed within the organisation temporarily in order to fulfil task-oriented objectives. In the case of AKAP, this was to effect knowledge management in Argentina, by brokering the 'capture' and 'deployment' of key knowledge from Argentina to key audiences within the Post Office. The Project Team and Project Board formed for 7 months of the project in order to carry out this task.

The idea has been developed through Chapters 5 and 6, that AKAP's approach to capturing knowledge was based on using 'intermediaries' or 'brokers' to intervene in codifying the knowledge of individuals. In some cases this has involved the intermediaries further codifying this knowledge at a 'secondary' level. The two cases presented in this chapter are both examples of groups specifically formed in order to perform the codification of knowledge at this secondary level - the AKAP analysis meetings, and the codification of the AKAP project reports.

As shown in the objectives of AKAP in Appendix B, one of the key aims of the project was 'to provide a summary of the learning gained from the Argentina experience.' This chapter examines the cases of knowledge codification which occurred in order to generate this 'summary of the learning.' First the AKAP analysis meetings were convened in order to pull together the mass of documentation captured and codified by the AKAP project up to this point, and somehow to synthesise this material into a summary of the 'learning.' The outputs from these meetings fed into the codification of the Learning Summary Report, which was produced by AKAP as one of its deliverable products. There were other reports codified by the AKAP project. These are introduced, but not discussed in as much depth.

In each of the cases of knowledge codification there are distinct and separate groups involved. In the AKAP analysis meetings, the groups are not directly congruent with the Project Team - the makeup of each group varies from the Project Team in different ways. This affects the balance of interests within the process, which in turn shows through in what knowledge is codified in each case. In the case of the AKAP project reports, the formal group level is essentially the AKAP Project Team.

This chapter presents cases of knowledge codification occurring in a group context. An interesting issue which emerges is whether the knowledge codified from the process represents

group knowledge. The Learning Summary Report, for example, was codified by one individual author. However the report was generated in a group context, and interaction within the group affected what knowledge was eventually codified in the report. This chapter is not attempting to say that the Learning Summary Report represents the group's knowledge. Although it is codified by an individual author, it is that individual's interpretation of a knowledge codification process which occurred in a formal group context.

A narrative running through the two cases is the development of a typology of knowledge which was seen to emerge in Chapter 6. Therefore a discourse emerges over the 'technical' knowledge content of the Knowledge Interview outputs, vis-à-vis the more 'generic' issues - for example, 'people' and 'project organisation' - which had also come out in the Knowledge Interviews.

The chapter will first examine the codification of knowledge which occurred at the AKAP analysis meetings. As the Learning Summary Report was contingent upon what came out of the analysis meetings, the codification of the AKAP project reports follow.

7.2 AKAP analysis of knowledge captured

A key stage in the AKAP project was the analysis process, also known throughout this section as the Analysis Meetings, as the process was effectively conducted around two meetings in February and March 2000. The need for an analysis process - or at least a period of gestation for synthesising the knowledge needed to arrive at the project's objectives of capturing 'key knowledge' and 'summarising the learning' - was not recognised in the project plan.

According to the original Project Plan presented at the Project Initiation Meeting on 27.10.99, the project was to have reached a stage of having "all knowledge captured and assessed" by 23.12.99, yet by this time there had been no discussion in team meetings or on TeamWeb about

what would characterise the ‘assessment.’ Even when it was realised that there needed to be a group analysis process, this was not accommodated into the PRINCE project plan.

The Analysis Meetings can therefore be seen as operating out of ‘project management mode.’ They were formally constituted in an ad hoc manner, in order to perform a task which became apparent during the project process. The groups were also different for both meetings. This showed through in what knowledge was codified in the respective meetings.

The need for an ‘analysis meeting’ was first mooted by the AKAP Project Manager, when the Knowledge Interview material started to be delivered to the AKAP project team in early 2000, and the Electronic Filing Cabinet was filling up with documents captured from the Argentina Consultancy Project. With the volume of material accumulating, it became obvious that some form of group process would be required in order to do what AKAP was proposing. It was surprising that this discussion had not been aired earlier.

There was originally no expectation that two meetings would be necessary. However, eventually two groups were needed to deal with the knowledge captured by AKAP. These two groups comprised mostly of AKAP team members. The 1st Analysis Meeting took place on February 8 at the Post Office’s Training and Development centre near Milton Keynes, and the 2nd Analysis Meeting took place on March 7 at the Holiday Inn in Chesterfield.

The idea that this was an ‘analysis’ was first documented in an email from Teresa Singer, the AKAP Board Member, who had been brought in to advise on the use of Knowledge Interviews:¹

¹ Email from Teresa Singer to Andrew Church (as Product Manager for AKAP Knowledge Interviews) 14.12.99

“There is a further thought regarding cross-interview analysis - how do you propose this should be handled. If I understand the brief correctly then you will be provided with a number of individual analysis. Valuable as they no doubt are I feed a major coding exercise coming on and Patricia might want to invest in a couple of copies of Nudist or some other software to help analyse a number of transcripts. What do you think??”

It was therefore Patricia Dalrymple, the AKAP Project Manager, who convened the first analysis meeting. Patricia invited Teresa Singer to facilitate the meetings. She was an obvious choice given her PRINCE Board role of ‘Senior Technical’ on the Knowledge Interviews side. It was everyone’s assumption that the primary purpose of the meetings was to go through the AKAP Knowledge Interview outputs to extract the ‘key knowledge and learning.’

Before taking on the role of facilitator, Teresa felt that getting involved with the project process would compromise her role on the Project Board, and would prevent her from viewing and judging the process impartially.² She had, after all, refused to conduct any Knowledge Interviews for the AKAP team. However, when it came to the analysis meetings she broke this resolve. Indeed she saw it as a good opportunity to make the process more “rigorous.”³ She decided to break this self-imposed distance over the analysis process, because she was being asked ‘how do we do this’ and felt that “if I don’t tell them how to do it, they are going to be stuck.”⁴ However, at the meeting she tried to make it into the group’s decision as to what should be done.⁵ Nevertheless this is a clear indication that Teresa Singer was aware of her own prominence in steering a process for the meeting. As she says herself, she has a habit of “taking things over.”⁶

² Telephone conversation with Teresa Singer 6.12.99 note on p.95 of fieldwork journal; and Teresa Singer interview 17.3.00 count 1/A 060

³ Teresa Singer interview 17.3.00 count 1/A 056

⁴ Teresa Singer interview 17.3.00 count 1/B 060

⁵ Teresa Singer interview 17.3.00 count 1/B 065

⁶ Teresa Singer interview 17.3.00 count 1/B 080

The other participants in the initial analysis meeting - Patricia, Simon, Andrew and Polly - were all AKAP project team members. Val did not attend the 1st Analysis Meeting, but did participate in the second. When talking about it afterwards, Val reflected that the idea of an analysis meeting was strange.⁷ It surprised her that there was not an established way of treating the Knowledge Interview outputs; “I had assumed again, perhaps naively, that this was a well established process.” She had not thought much about the process of arriving at a Learning Summary, having assumed it was all part of Post Office Consulting’s “black box process.”⁸

Prior to the first meeting, expectations were high. Patricia, Polly and Andrew in particular hoped that the meeting would achieve a lot. The week before, Polly had said “this time next week it will be all over.”⁹

7.2.1 First Analysis Meeting

The 1st AKAP analysis meeting took place on February 8 at the Post Office’s Training and Development centre in Milton Keynes. In the days leading up to the meeting, Andrew had been chasing AKAP Knowledge Interviewers for their transcripts and case-studies so that the project team members would have a chance to pre-read them in advance of the meeting. Many of the Knowledge Interview outputs had been delivered late, meaning that the analysis group members had minimal time to pre-read the documents before the meeting. In most cases it was skimmed through on the train on the way up. In fact the participants were overwhelmed with material - they each had a pile of over 30 documents (Knowledge Interview and Shorter Interview transcripts, Knowledge interview ‘case-studies,’ AKAP Questionnaires and some of the Argentina Consultants Knowledge Reports). This amounted to over 500 pages of text. In Patricia’s view she was confronted with a vast amount of information and of very varying standards, describing “some of it as good, some not so good and some does not say anything at

⁷ Val Kennedy interview 31.3.00 count 1/A 363

⁸ Val Kennedy interview 31.3.00 count 1/A 380 - 410

⁹ Field note on Dictaphone tape 1/A count 034

all.”¹⁰ She suggested that some of the Knowledge Interviews were not “Knowledge Interviews, but a 5 hour ‘tell me what you know.’”¹¹

As AKAP Project Manager, Patricia’s expectation of the 1st Analysis Meeting was to produce something to take to the Board at the End of Stage 2 Meeting two days later.¹² Patricia went into the meeting with an expectation that the group would need to discuss who the audiences are.¹³ It was also her feeling that the group needed to take something tangible to the Project Board so that the Board could take a view on who the users are and how to deploy the knowledge to them.¹⁴ At this stage, Patricia was still assuming that the main deliverables of AKAP would be workshops and presentations. The balance of the project deployment in her mind was still tipped towards the ‘learning’ from Argentina, rather than ‘learning’ from the using the knowledge capture tools. However, this discussion of how the knowledge captured in the process would be deployed did not occur at the meeting. The participants therefore approached the process with no sense of an end-use context for the knowledge they were codifying. The only ‘user’ mentioned was the Project Board who were going to be presented with what came out of the day.

As facilitator, Teresa was responsible for establishing how to go about the analysis process. When she arrived at the meeting carrying a bag full of pens and post-it notes of all shapes, sizes and colours, this was an indication of what she had in mind. Teresa’s vision was to create ‘zones’ around the room. These would be generated from the Knowledge Interview case-studies. It was initially recommended by Teresa that the group would just look at the case-studies, with the implication that this would be an effective summary of the Interview. In practice it proved necessary to go back to the Knowledge Interview transcripts in order to get a

¹⁰ Patricia Dalrymple at 1st Analysis Meeting 8.2.00 note on p.109 of fieldwork journal

¹¹ Patricia Dalrymple interview 27.4.00 count 1/A 520

¹² Comment by Patricia Dalrymple at 1st Analysis Meeting 8.2.00 - note on p111 of fieldwork journal.

¹³ From observations at the Analysis Meeting 8.2.00

¹⁴ Telephone conversation with Patricia Dalrymple 2.2.00. Loose field note; and Patricia Dalrymple at 1st Analysis Meeting 8.2.00 note on p.110 of fieldwork journal

flavour for the context in which things were said. This inevitably raised the question, does the case-study therefore stand on its own? In the end all the AKAP outputs were used, including the questionnaires.

Teresa's original assumption was that the group would work in pairs in order to 'verify' each other's work, referring back to the suggested agenda she posted up at the beginning of the meeting. However due to time constraints and the volume of material it was decided to work individually. Teresa wanted the participants to read through the case-studies quickly and jot down any 'concepts' which stand out to them. Simon Mann, unsure what was meant by 'concept' asked Teresa to explain. Her response was "anything which really stands out."¹⁵ So the group members were set to the task of reading through the AKAP knowledge capture outputs and jotting down anything which they found of interest.

The documents were divided up as it was clear not everybody could read everything. There was no clear rational for the distribution of documents - participants took whatever they fancied. Those people who had some prior knowledge of some documents (e.g. they had conducted the interview) tended to stick to those documents.

The time slot first suggested by Patricia for reading through the outputs and generating the Post It notes at first beggared belief. It was 11.45 by the time all the outputs had been divided up and the participants were ready to start the Post It note exercise. Patricia suggested spending until 12.30 on that stage - 45 minutes for reading through the knowledge capture outputs from some 3 or 4 consultants. This was clearly insufficient. It was 2.30 when the exercise was halted, and still the outputs had been skimmed through, some of them not covered at all. This episode echoed the initial project plan for AKAP. The amount of time needed to perform these tasks and processes was seriously underestimated by the 'project management' throughout.

¹⁵ Notes on p.112 of fieldwork journal

In terms of doing the outputs justice to their 'knowledge' content, the exercise represented approximately 30 person-hours of work¹⁶ yet it was felt that by the end the exercise had only really scratched the surface of what knowledge there was there. It is important to emphasise how quickly the documents were skimmed through superficially and 'knowledge' extracted as a few words or a quick sentence on a Post It note. This did not really do justice to the time it took to produce them. Moreover, there were some Knowledge Interview outputs not included in the Post It notes exercise, so the knowledge of some consultants was not represented at all. The outputs were covered neither evenly nor uniformly.

As the documents were being split up among the group, Patricia looked detached from the process, crossing her arms, sitting back in her chair and yawning.¹⁷ Her alienation was possibly because this was her first contact with the knowledge captured, and she was surprised at the variability of the quality, whereas those participants who had been involved in conducting the process were more prepared for what they would find. This meeting also showed Patricia being out of 'Project Management mode'¹⁸ and participating as a member of a different group. She became evidently happier during the afternoon when there was a clearer structure, purpose and some product from the exercise which she was going to be able to present to the Project Board.

During the day a discussion arose over the technical knowledge content in the Knowledge Interview outputs. Patricia clearly talked about technical knowledge in terms of knowledge of a technical project in Argentina, for example, Rick Donaldson's project to build a Mail Centre in Buenos Aires. She suggested that this was not so important to capture, as it is already known how to build a Mail Centre in the UK.¹⁹ There was agreement between Teresa and Polly that in order to capture this type of knowledge, the Interviewer needs to be an expert in the field. In the

¹⁶ 6 hours and 5 participants

¹⁷ Note on p.112 of fieldwork journal

¹⁸ where she was more used to making sure things happen according to the project plan

¹⁹ Interestingly, Chris Arthur highlighted the *speed* of the building of the Mail Centre in BA as important knowledge to capture, as this one was built in up to half the time it takes to build a Mail Centre in the UK. Patricia, however, appears to be thinking about the nuts and bolts of doing it.

previous chapter it was shown that in Polly's own experience of interviewing Rick, they steered clear of the Mail Centre because they knew that Polly would quickly get lost. Polly felt that one possibility of the process would be to make other potential users aware of the availability of this captured knowledge.²⁰ This is what ultimately happened when a 2nd Analysis Meeting was convened.

After the Post It note exercise was timed out, the participants were then requested to stick their Post It Notes up on the wall. The group then rearranged them on to flip charts under common headings. The headings which emerged were remarkably similar to those of the AKAP Knowledge Map. It had been suggested that the exercise of the day be structured around the Knowledge Map. However, at the outset the participants had been encouraged by Teresa to discard the Map and take a 'bottom up' approach to the data, using a standard content analysis technique to build up data and allow groups to emerge under common headings. Both Simon and Andrew found this is a strange exercise given that the Knowledge Map had already been codified by two consultants with direct knowledge of the Argentina Consultancy Project. Simon said, "aren't we coming up with the Knowledge Map" and Patricia snapped back "forget the Knowledge Map." Teresa's response was "one of the models we might come up with is the Knowledge Map."²¹ Simon Mann felt flabbergasted that he was effectively being asked to generate the Knowledge Map again.²² The Knowledge Map gave a well informed view of the areas in which knowledge could be captured by the process. The Map had been given to Interviewers to help them in their planning of the Knowledge Interview. It was little surprise therefore, that the headings which emerged on the walls of the meeting room were very similar to the extant Knowledge Map. What the participants in the Analysis Meeting were requested to do effectively was to come up with another version of the Knowledge Map.

²⁰ Polly Johnson at the 2nd Analysis Meeting 8.2.00 note on p.111 of fieldwork journal

²¹ Field note on Dictaphone tape 1/A count 084

²² Simon's comments outside the room while getting a quick break in the afternoon with Andrew were colourfully and forcefully expressed. Note on p.113 of fieldwork journal.

It was clear that the task was not going to be finished by the end of the day, and that a further meeting may be needed. However, this would depend upon the Board allowing the project to overrun. This was one of the decisions Patricia needed to be taken at the Board meeting two days later. In the end the 1st Analysis Meeting ran out of time. There was no discussion about next steps. Patricia's discussion about audiences and where the codified knowledge would go never did occur.²³ The flip chart sheets covered in sticky notes were rolled up and taken away by Patricia to be put up on the walls of the End of Stage 2 Board Meeting two days later. She wanted something to take to the Board meeting, and this was the output from the analysis process.

It had not been a pleasant day. The functional, box-shaped meeting room with no natural lighting did not help a long and arduous day's work. The only natural light into the room was through a corridor running down one side of the room which separated the room from the building's exterior. Due to Patricia's sensitivity over the confidential nature of the information being worked on, she felt it necessary to close the blinds of the windows between the room and the corridor, lest anyone passing down the corridor would see in. The lighting in the room was therefore from the strip lighting overhead. The room was hot and stuffy with no fresh air, and no drinks at hand. The effects of this combined with the dazzling array of Day-Glo Post It notes covering the walls visibly affected people's behaviour; most were irritable, and combined with the volume of work, it appeared to send some of the group a bit loopy. Patricia snapped at Simon and Andrew for taking an impromptu break when they urgently needed to get out of the room for some fresh air, and later apologised to them for getting a little overheated. This was after she had been outside because she needed a cigarette. At the end of the day, Simon and Andrew shot out of the door as quickly as they could to get away from what had been a difficult day, both in terms of the task, but also in terms of the environment which had clearly exacerbated the feelings of frustration in terms of what was achieved.

²³ Patricia Dalrymple at 1st Analysis Meeting 8.2.00 note on p.111 of fieldwork journal

Polly described the 1st Analysis Meeting as “depressing and demoralising and other things starting with D.”²⁴

7.2.2 What was taken to the Project Board

As discussed in the previous section, Patricia was insistent on taking the results of the Analysis Meeting to the End of Stage 2 Board Meeting on February 10, to get the Board’s view on what should happen to this material. As suggested in Chapter 5, Patricia’s expectations of the role which the Board would assume in the project were not fulfilled.

It is useful at this point to gain some of the reactions made by Project Board members when the material from the 1st Analysis Meeting were taken to them two days later. This meeting of the Board occurred at what was defined by the AKAP Project Plan as the ‘end of stage 2’, that is, the end of the knowledge capture phase before the analysis and the deployment of the ‘key knowledge and learning.’ This crucial meeting of the Board is discussed in greater depth in the following chapter. However in this section, some of the reactions by the Board members to what came out of the 1st Analysis Meeting is given. In order to show the Board members what the team had done, the flip charts with the Post-It notes on were stuck up around the walls of the meeting room.²⁵

During the first 20 minutes of the meeting in which Patricia was doing most of the talking, there was no visible reaction from the Board members except Cynthia Houston, who cast many quizzical glances towards the Post It notes before they were discussed. When there was a discussion about the ‘knowledge’ on the sticky notes, these are some of the remarks made by AKAP Project Board members;

²⁴ Polly Johnson comment at 2nd Analysis Meeting 7.3.00 Note on p.155 of fieldwork journal.

²⁵ The notes for this section were all taken from fieldwork journal pp. 121-125.

- Cynthia Houston said “this is all subjective anyway.”
- Bob Field pointed out jokingly to Cynthia, “it’s all right, there’s only a few under team conflict.”
- Bob also suggested, “if Chris Arthur could see this he would say ‘there’s tears all over the wall, the walls are bleeding.’”

These comments were because the material codified by the Analysis Meeting came mostly under the headings of ‘people issues’ and the ‘project organisation’ - precisely the things which some people had felt dominated the Knowledge Interview cases shown in the previous chapter. As the AKAP Board member John Macallan remarked, these are really ‘soft’ issues, there is not much about what they did in Argentina. There was a lot of discussion at that meeting over why the Knowledge Interview process appeared to have been dominated by the ‘soft’ people and project management related issues.

The discussion around the Post It notes developed into a discussion about how interviews tend towards people’s feelings and ‘soft’ issues. In Bob Field’s analysis, an interview will always reflect how the work went rather than documents which say what was done. Cynthia agreed that in an interview situation the people issues get magnified and was quick in her organisation’s defence of why some of these ‘people’ and ‘project organisation’ issues had clearly emerged in the interviews.

The discussion also saw Teresa Singer justifying why the AKAP Knowledge Interviews looked like this, and joining with Bob in opining that this material does not give much “tacit stuff on the technical side.”²⁶ Patricia also shared her “gut reaction” that this is missing the “technical” side. Teresa claimed that this is what the Knowledge Interview is supposed to be about and suggested that there was a quality issue relating to how the AKAP Knowledge Interviews were handled. Teresa also referred to a particular set of case-studies from a Knowledge Interview

²⁶ Bob Field said this, and Teresa Singer agreed. Note p.122 of fieldwork journal.

which really exemplify the Knowledge Interview by presenting ‘work specifications.’²⁷ Teresa wanted to see the emphasis of the knowledge capture process focus on the technical side of people’s knowledge and move it away from the “sensitive stuff.”²⁸

When at the Board meeting it was decided to extend the project deadline beyond the end of March, the AKAP Project Team decided to hold a further analysis meeting to continue what they had started at the first. It was decided that at this second analysis meeting, the emphasis would be on extracting more of the ‘technical’ knowledge content from the material captured and codified by AKAP.

7.2.3 Second Analysis Meeting

The 2nd Analysis Meeting took place on March 7 2000 at the Holiday Inn Express, Chesterfield. The make up of the group was different again from the first. It was a unique group formed specifically for the purpose of ‘analysing’ the knowledge which had not been covered in the 1st Analysis Meeting, and any new documents captured or codified since then. This time, Val Kennedy joined the meeting with Andrew, Polly, Simon and Teresa, who was again asked to do the facilitation.

Patricia met the other project team members the evening before at the hotel for a project team meeting, when they performed an ‘After Action Review’ on how the project had gone up to this point. Patricia also had time to fit in a quick run down of the project plan before the team went out for dinner. The following day Patricia was unable to participate in the meeting. The absence of Patricia made it a more relaxed affair, and the core project team really got down to work to their own agenda. This was further reinforced after the hasty departure of Teresa Singer mid-afternoon which made the core-group tighter, more cohesive and sharing agreement in the work

²⁷ Comment by Teresa Singer at End of Stage 2 Board Meeting 10.2.00

²⁸ Teresa Singer interview 17.3.00 count 1/A 038

which was being performed. The result was an analysis group much happier with the output of the 2nd Analysis Meeting than the first.

Compared with the room for the 1st Analysis Meeting, the environment of the 2nd Analysis Meeting was much more pleasant and conducive to work. It was smaller and more intimate with plenty of daylight and fresh air from an opening window. There was tea, coffee and water in the room. The environment in this case clearly enhanced the overall sense of well-being about what was achieved that day.

At the beginning of the 2nd analysis meeting, there was a 'struggle' between Teresa Singer and the predominant group (effectively the AKAP team) over the approach to the second analysis exercise. However, Teresa was obliged to go with the majority view. Teresa admits that having seen the Knowledge Interview case-studies at the 1st Analysis Meeting, she started the 2nd Analysis Meeting in a "degree of desperation" thinking "oh my god, we need to redo this."²⁹ She wanted to spend the day reworking the AKAP case-studies in order to make them look more a standardised and homogenous product which she believed the Knowledge Interview process should produce. Simon, Val and Polly all insisted that there be no further work on AKAP Knowledge Interview outputs. At this point, Teresa did admit that she had "emotional baggage" and "fears and insecurities" which she needs to push to one side.³⁰

It is suggested that Teresa's attempts to protect the Knowledge Interview tool - as one of the technique's original developers and keenest advocates - affected the way she conducted herself at the 2nd analysis meeting. This stemmed from her perception that the Knowledge Interview technique had not been used as the process prescribes. In her words, her first impressions of what came out of the Knowledge Interviews was that there's "a lot of management of conversation, but not enough cognitive recall." As a core member of the group which codified

²⁹ Teresa Singer interview 31.3.00 count 1/B 120

³⁰ Teresa Singer at 2nd Analysis Meeting 7.3.00 Note p.154 of fieldwork journal.

the Knowledge Interview process, Teresa said she had not realised until she saw the AKAP Knowledge Interview outputs in preparation for the 1st Analysis Meeting, that she had not “communicated her tacit Knowledge Interview strategy.”³¹

Prior to the 2nd Analysis Meeting, Teresa attempted to use this experience of the variability of Knowledge Interviews in AKAP to set some independent quality review criteria for the product. She tried to do this within the AKAP Project and to get team members involved. However, no one was willing to take on the extra work, and in any case, this was not part of project plan. The quality review criteria would be generic to all cases where the Knowledge Interview tool is used. Teresa’s idea was to ask questions such as “is the knowledge gained sufficient to meet customer requirements, is it sufficiently probed, is there enough technical info etc.”³² She outlined her ideas in an email from which this extract is taken;

“Re the review process - it is aimed at checking whether the content of the interview has captured what the interviewee had to offer and I think is vital for the capture of more technical stuff (how do we know that we have got it right - are we trying to abstract good practice ...?)”³³

However, it appeared that at this meeting, the core group representing the AKAP team was more in control than the facilitator had been at the 1st Analysis Meeting. The other participants were all keen to extract as much as possible in terms of the ‘technical knowledge’ content³⁴ of the documents captured and codified by AKAP. The second meeting was, after all, convened in order to focus on this technical side.³⁵ Teresa was also keen on the technical side, but was clearly trying to protect the Knowledge Interview tool from what she perceived as variability in the quality of outputs, saying that the participants should read the case-studies again, and if

³¹ Teresa Singer interview 17.3.00 count 1/A 080

³² Email from Teresa Singer to Simon Mann 16.2.00

³³ Email from Teresa Singer to Simon Mann 17.2.00

³⁴ Simon Mann and Polly Johnson were really pushing down this line. Dictaphone field note 8.3.00 tape count 1/A 215

³⁵ Email from Simon Mann to Teresa Singer 11.2.00 and to the AKAP project team 18.2.00

there is not 'enough' technical knowledge in it, then they should go and get some more.³⁶ The other participants, as AKAP project team members, were more interested in providing potential users access to the documents captured and codified by AKAP, rather than any technical knowledge content getting lost in a large library of very varied documents.

As a result of this discussion around technical knowledge, Teresa had the realisation that the process of cross-analysis can be seen in terms of 'generic' things, but that cross-analysis is not really relevant to technical knowledge, which is more personal and rooted in the work context.³⁷ This perhaps suggests why the use of a cross-analysis process in the 1st Analysis Meeting inevitably resulted in more 'generic' findings.

Teresa eventually came round to the idea that when it comes to the technical knowledge content of documents, a 'road map' to the location of these documents (much like AKAP's very own Knowledge Map) is the best way to provide access. If someone in the Post Office needs to benefit from the technical knowledge which a consultant gained in Argentina, then the most likely benefit of a codified document is to indicate the technical knowledge areas covered by its author.

Polly first of all hit upon the novel idea of creating a pull-out section to the *In Touch Magazine*. This became translated into a rather less ambitious product, by creating an index as a reference guide to the documents contained in the AKAP EFC. It was decided to use the Knowledge Map as a template for the headings used to create the index. At the 2nd Analysis Meeting the AKAP Knowledge Map was therefore resurrected. Moreover, it was decided to use Chris Arthur's detailed version of the Knowledge Map, which had a comprehensive breakdown of the technical operations which consultants had been working on for the Correo.

³⁶ Field note on Dictaphone count 1/A 270

³⁷ Teresa Singer comment at 2nd Analysis Meeting 7.3.00 Note on p.152 of fieldwork journal.

The work was organised by dividing up the documents among the participants. Each participant would then go through the document, pick out any reference to technical knowledge in the document, and reference it according to the existing headings and sub-headings given in Chris' Knowledge Map, or create a new heading if one was not there. Thus the index was created and the Knowledge Map modified (see the section on the Learning Summary Report).

It was interesting to see how people participated in extracting the 'technical knowledge' from the outputs. Simon Mann was very productive at the meeting, going through many documents and extracting many references from them. This was perhaps due to his length of time in the Post Office and good overall knowledge of the postal operation. Val Kennedy was also able to interpret a lot. Andrew and Polly were less productive because of limitations in knowledge of the Post Office operation. Andrew in particular had to ask many questions to the other participants about postal operations. This is an issue to do with whether the formal group was constituted with appropriate technical knowledge to perform the task. This echoes the previous chapter where in individual cases of interviews, some interviewers could not cover technical issues in the interview because of lack of knowledge and familiarity with the subject matter.³⁸

During the meeting in a conversation across the table,³⁹ Teresa claimed that she was only really impressed by the Knowledge Interview case studies which were completely depersonalised, that is, the case-study does not identify the person who has been interviewed.

At the end of the 2nd Analysis Meeting, Val Kennedy said she "ended up feeling good, largely because we actually steered it in the way we wanted it to go, and I think we did produce something vaguely useful from it."⁴⁰ Indeed, all members of the core group felt chipper after the

³⁸ These were both suggested by Val Kennedy as explanations of the apparent predominance of 'soft' issues both in the coverage of Knowledge Interviews, but also in what emerged from the Analysis Meetings. Posting on TeamWeb in discussion of the Tools Evaluation Report 12.4.00

³⁹ Field note on Dictaphone count 1/A 254

⁴⁰ Val Kennedy interview 31.3.00 count 1/A 473

meeting. There was a buzz in the air of the second analysis meeting unlike the atmosphere at the first.

7.3 Codification of AKAP project reports

There were a number of reports which were written as deliverables of the AKAP project. These were codified in the project plan in separate PRINCE Product Descriptions. There were 4 AKAP deliverable reports;

- Learning Summary Report
- Tools Evaluation Report - split into two separately authored parts
- Model for future knowledge capture and deployment
- Recommendations for ongoing knowledge management in Argentina

There was also one Project report produced as PRINCE deliverable (for inclusion on the Knowledge Management Practitioner Group's Contract database) - the Project Evaluation Report.

These reports represent codification of knowledge performed in the act of writing them. In all cases one author was responsible for codifying the report, but they were all codified in a group context. The Learning Summary Report stands out as having been codified in a group context. The knowledge in the other reports was codified by their individual authors, but the group context is less apparent in the report.

The reports will not all be discussed in depth. The Learning Summary Report is considered worthy of closer examination, because it was the direct product of the analysis meetings and because of the level of group involvement. The Learning Summary Report is really what the project as a whole said it had captured in terms of 'key learning' from the 'Argentina

experience.’ However, as discussed in the 1st analysis meeting, ‘key learning’ is probably more appropriately defined in terms of what the project team as a group had learned about the Argentina experience, than what the Argentina consultants themselves had learned.

In the discussion of all the reports, it is important to consider who the knowledge in the report is being codified for: Is there a known user, or is it for an imaginary audience? It can be seen that an anticipated audience to some extent determines the way it is codified, in terms of the language used and the report’s content.

7.3.1 Learning Summary Report

The Learning Summary Report was produced in order to fulfil one of AKAP’s objectives, which was;

“to provide a summary of the learning gained from the Argentina experience.”⁴¹

Who was it written for? The Learning Summary Report is codified as a product of AKAP, but principally to be delivered to the Project Board. On the front cover it says ‘Prepared for the AKAP Project Board.’

The obvious question to ask is whose ‘learning’ does it represent? The explicit aims of the Learning Summary Report do not shed any light on whose ‘learning’ is summarised in the report;

“The Learning Summary aims to highlight the key areas of knowledge captured using the knowledge interview tool, shorter interviews and questionnaires, along with the knowledge transfer reports (produced by consultants who worked on the Argentina assignment) stored in the AKAP EFC ... The

⁴¹ See the AKAP Project Initiation Document - Appendix B

knowledge summarised in this report comes from a wide range of key players involved in the Argentina assignment ...”

In order to address this question it would help to look at what the Learning Summary Report contains.

The Learning Summary Report is an A4 bound copy, with 9 pages of text and 31 pages of annexes. The text is based around the headings of the AKAP Knowledge Map, splitting the Knowledge Map between ‘technical’ areas of knowledge, and the ‘generic’ areas of knowledge sub-divided into;

- Pre-Award Phase
- Contract
- Client Relationship
- People
- Environment

Patricia felt that Polly’s first draft of the Learning Summary Report was too sensitive, and would come out as critical of BPCS. Also there should be a more clear split between ‘generic’ and ‘technical.’ Although Polly was happy to follow this recommendation on ‘generic’ and ‘technical’ knowledge, she was less happy to sideline some of the more sensitive issues which came out in the Interviews. In Polly’s words, she felt that the consultants from Argentina who had participated would think it was a ‘whitewash’ if the issues were sidelined.⁴²

When she was writing it, Polly really felt that she had no expectation of what would happen to the Learning Summary Report and where it would be going. She simply viewed it in terms of a

⁴² Telephone conversation with Polly Johnson 23.3.00. Loose field note.

product which had to be completed as a deliverable of the project.⁴³ Polly said in the email which supported her first draft of the Learning Summary Report for comment by the Project team;⁴⁴

I thought the analysis was bad enough, but trying to condense even the analysis into a report, I feel awash with it all ... I can only hope that doesn't come across in the report.

The report is a highly condensed representation of the complex knowledge codification processes which occurred in the Knowledge Interviews and the analysis meetings. The report's use of the code of 'technical' and 'generic' may not be intuitive to an individual from outside the codification group. Similarly the decision to devote a large part of the report to an index of the technical knowledge content of documents codified and captured by AKAP also emerges from that discourse. These points illustrate that there is very much a group context to how the form of codification in the report emerged.

It is interesting to note that there are more substantial and specific recommendations under the heading 'people.' The number of recommendations in this section compared with other sections does not correspond to the respective size of the sections in the main body of the report. Furthermore, the recommendations made are comparatively easy ones to make.⁴⁵ They do not require any substantial knowledge of the Argentina Consultancy Project in order to be drawn, but they can be drawn from common experience of working in an organisation. This is a similar observation to how 'knowledge' was extracted at the 1st Analysis Meeting. In the limited time available, anything which grabbed participants was quickly jotted down, and these were the simple people and welfare-related observations, which did not require knowledge of the Argentina project in order to judge their validity. This observation may be at the heart of the

⁴³ Polly Johnson interview 16.3.00 count 1/13 255

⁴⁴ Email from Polly Johnson to AKAP Project Team 22.3.00

⁴⁵ The 'people' recommendations are things like; an open day for the applicant and the family; on a two year assignment successful applicants should be able to visit the location before accepting the position

treatment of ‘people issues’ among the ‘generic’ knowledge from the project. These were the common things that people were saying.

The conclusion of the Learning Summary Report finds that the major difference between the AKAP Knowledge Map and the post-AKAP version is the absence of any knowledge captured around the Pre-Award phase and the Contract areas of the Map. The Report concludes that;

“We can surmise that perhaps the fact that little or no knowledge was captured around the Pre-Award Phase and the Contract was owing to issues of confidentiality.”

When she wrote this, Polly was perhaps not aware that Cynthia Houston’s contribution to the Contract area of the Map had been substantial in her Knowledge Interview. However, the outputs from Cynthia’s interview had not been used in the 1st Analysis Meeting. It was overlooked because of the constraint of time. It then did not feature in the ‘technical knowledge’ focus of the 2nd meeting. There was knowledge codified at a primary level by AKAP, but it had simply not been used in the secondary codification process.

The Learning Summary Report also included a number of indexes and reference sources produced in the course the project:

- an index to the AKAP Electronic Filing Cabinet
- a copy of the AKAP Knowledge Map, and a modified version of the Map ‘post knowledge capture and analysis.’ The post-AKAP version is essentially the same as the pre-AKAP version except for the ‘Contract’ area, which was discussed above
- a contact list for consultants who were involved in the Argentina Consultancy Project and AKAP. This was driven by the discussion at the 2nd Analysis Meeting that it was important to put people in the organisation in touch if they wanted to benefit from each other’s

technical or operational knowledge. This stemmed from the generic/ technical discourse which threaded throughout the project. It also led to the following annex to the Report;

- a technical knowledge map, which was a more detailed expansion of area 6 of the AKAP Knowledge Map. This was based on Chris Arthur's earlier work on the Knowledge Map, discussed in Chapter 6, and formed the basis of a large part of the activity at the 2nd Analysis Meeting. As described in the case in the previous section, Chris Arthur's detailed technical area of the Knowledge Map was used as a key word index to the documents codified and captured by AKAP. As the process was not complete by the end of the 2nd Analysis Meeting, a document was sent round the participants in which they indexed the technical knowledge content of the documents they had read. This formed the basis for the final annex in the Report;
- a guide to the technical knowledge map. This index arranges all the documents used in the AKAP analysis meetings under headings from the technical knowledge map. For each area keywords are given, with the name of the document, the subject (individual) of the document and the page reference.

Returning to the question of whose learning is represented in the Learning Summary Report, this is knowledge codified at a secondary level. The group involved in taking the knowledge codified at a primary level by AKAP, and synthesising it into a summary of knowledge which people have about the Argentina Consultancy Project, are inevitably going to be bringing their own knowledge into the process. For example, recommendations are inherently about what the project has concluded needs to be done from what they have learned went wrong. This is not an objective representation of what consultants said about their knowledge, this is codification of knowledge constructed and situated very much in the AKAP group context.

7.3.2 Other reports

As for the other reports, it has been argued that the group context of codification is less apparent in these reports. The most interesting question to ask of them is, ‘who is the knowledge codified for?’

The *Tools Evaluation Report* was split into two parts. The first was written by Andrew Church and was a critical discussion of how the Knowledge Interview technique and other knowledge capture tools (as defined by AKAP) were used in practice. This was largely written from his perspective as the Knowledge Interview Product Manager for AKAP, responsible for co-ordinating the Knowledge Interview programme and liaising with the Interviewers and Interviewees. He worked alone on producing it. Even though feedback from AKAP participants was sought in order to derive the information, this was not a group effort in the sense that a group process derived the content. The report was codified for an imagined user who might be interested in finding out about the experience of using Post Office Consulting’s knowledge capture tools in the AKAP context.

The second part of the *Tools Evaluation Report* was exclusively about the trial of the software-based Knowledge Visualisation technique being developed at Brunel University and trialled in AKAP by the Post Office Research Group. This part was written by Val Kennedy, who was codifying the report for a distinct audience or ‘community’ with the appropriate technical knowledge needed to make sense of the report. It was decided to keep the two parts of the Tools Evaluation Report separate precisely because they were codified for such different audiences.

The *Model for future knowledge capture and deployment* and the *Recommendations for ongoing knowledge management in Argentina* were both written by Simon Mann.

Early in the project, the Model was something which Patricia was really keen to deliver. At the first meeting of the project Patricia voiced her preference for seeing the output of the project as a process or model for knowledge capture and deployment, and that in two years time she did not wish to see the organisation being in the same position of wondering how to capture knowledge from another overseas project.⁴⁶ As the project progressed, Patricia appeared to de-emphasise this earlier goal of using AKAP to establish a model for knowledge capture and deployment. She had originally appointed herself the product manager for this Model report (presumably because she was keen to direct it), but passed the mantle to Simon, claiming lack of time to commit to the task. It was not known who would be using the report. Simon therefore had to do his best with little help from anyone. This was very much written with no sense of an end-user.

The *Recommendations for ongoing knowledge management in Argentina* report was codified specifically for the benefit of the continuing consultancy team in Argentina. This reflected the original basis of the project, which was to assist the continuing project in Argentina with processes for how to continue their Knowledge Management. It was originally intended that AKAP would provide that springboard (in the same way that it was intended to generate the Model for future knowledge capture and deployment). The principle user would be Chris Arthur, the continuing head of the Argentina Consultancy Project for the duration of AKAP. However, for reasons already discussed, his interests in AKAP were sidelined. He was not consulted in the writing of the report. However, Simon did at least have some sense of a context of usage in mind.

The *AKAP Project Evaluation Report* was codified for an entirely different audience to the other reports which were codified as project deliverables. The way this report was codified is interesting. It stemmed from the Project Evaluation Meeting, which was the final meeting of the AKAP Project Team on May 26 2000. At the meeting the project team discussed how the

⁴⁶ Patricia Dalrymple at AKAP Brainstorm Meeting 28.7.99. Note on p.51 of fieldwork journal

project went, how the team worked together, how they defined their roles and how they performed their work. The formal codified template for conducting this requirement of the PRINCE process was actively discarded, and the team had an open, free-flowing and uncritical discussion. Yet when it came to writing the report, Patricia interpreted all of this in terms of how PRINCE would deal with the issues, focusing on what could have been improved about the management of the project in terms of the appropriate PRINCE response. So in codifying this report, Patricia Dalrymple was addressing the requirements of the PRINCE process. This was the context of usage of the Project Evaluation Report. This is consistent with Patricia's project management approach to the entire AKAP process.

7.4 Concluding section

This chapter has presented cases of knowledge codification occurring within AKAP at a formal group level, that is, within the context of groups formed and tasked specifically with conducting the codification of knowledge. These cases have shown that interaction within the composition of the group is important to the codification process. This was shown in the difference between the 1st and 2nd Analysis Meeting groups. The balance of interests of participants affected what was codified in the process.

As can be expected with activity in organisations occurring within a formal group context, group dynamics affected the process. The formal groups in AKAP had their mixture, for example, of dominant individuals, enthusiasts and cynics. In the 2nd AKAP Analysis Meetings, one particular dominant individual showed other interests driving her approach: Her wish first and foremost was to protect the reputation of the Knowledge Interview technique, rather than to concentrate on how to improve access to the knowledge which AKAP had already captured and codified.

As shown in the previous two chapters, the question of who this knowledge was being captured for was a principle concern for AKAP. The Knowledge Map had failed to pin down specific areas of knowledge for specific audiences within the Post Office. The Knowledge Interviews were occurring without any sense of the 'end-use' context for the codified product. Having captured all this knowledge, AKAP now had to do something with it. The analysis meetings were convened in order to fulfil AKAP's objectives of 'capturing key knowledge of the Argentina experience' and producing a 'summary of the learning.' AKAP's approach was to convene these formal groups to pull out the 'key knowledge and learning' and to synthesis this 'learning' into a composite report.

But who was it being done for? At the 1st Analysis Meeting, the objective was to 'take something to the Board' in order to get the AKAP Board to take a view on what areas to focus on and how to continue with the knowledge management process. However, at this stage the groups did not know how the codified knowledge would be used. Although the codification occurred in order to generate a report, the report itself was codified in a vacuum, that is, without any sense of an 'end-use' context. In some of the other project reports, the question of who the report was being codified for was a little clearer. For example, the AKAP End of Project Evaluation Report was clearly codified as a requirement of the PRINCE process, and the Knowledge Visualisation aspect of the Tools Evaluation Report was clearly codified for a user community interested in software-based knowledge modelling.

An interesting question raised by these cases is 'whose knowledge is codified?' Does the 'learning' and 'knowledge' codified represent the Argentina Consultants', or the group which codified the knowledge at this level? As can be seen in the 'case-studies' from Knowledge Interviews, the knowledge clearly changes when other intermediaries are involved. In the Learning Summary Report, for example, the learning is evidently more what the AKAP participants have learned about Argentina, than a composite summary of what the Argentina Consultants themselves learned there. As in the Knowledge Interview case studies, the Learning

Summary Report represents what the participants chose to bring out. In the previous chapter it was also argued that the knowledge already codified changes when further levels of participation in the codification process occur. The cases presented in this chapter highlight the importance of the intermediary's role at this secondary level of knowledge codification. It was also shown in Chapter 6 that the intermediaries have to make critical decisions in their evaluation of what to codify. In this chapter, these critical decisions were made in a group context, and in these cases, the group was acting as the intermediary.

This chapter also showed that the knowledge of the participants - and their familiarity with the codified knowledge they were working with - affected what knowledge they codified in the process. This issue was observed in Chapter 6. The issue was also seen in this chapter, particularly in the 2nd Analysis Meeting, where the objective was to index the 'technical' knowledge content of the AKAP Knowledge Interview outputs. While some of the participants who had been in the business for longer, and knew more about postal operations, were able to cover a lot of documents in the meeting, some of the participants knew less about postal operations and were much slower because they had to keep checking things with the others.

Finally, following on from a typology of knowledge which began to emerge in the individual Knowledge Interview cases, this chapter has shown how the same typology emerged in the 1st Analysis Meeting, was reinforced at the 2nd Analysis Meeting, and was formally codified into the Learning Summary Report. It is now possible to see what is happening here in terms of the use and development of *codes* in the knowledge codification process. The distinction in these cases, codified into the structure of the Learning Summary Report, was dichotomised between 'technical' and 'generic' knowledge.

Technical, as it has already been defined, refers to the technical aspects of the individual's knowledge which was developed and applied to the postal operations in Argentina. 'Generic' refers to knowledge which appeared to be expressed by more than one individual: There were

recurring themes concerning the treatment of the consultants and their welfare – that is the ‘people’ issues in the Learning Summary Report, and the management and leadership of the Argentina Consultancy Project – coming under ‘project organisation’ in the Learning Summary Report. In the analysis meetings this ‘generic’ type knowledge was also talked about as the ‘soft’ issues of the Argentina Consultancy Project, as opposed to the ‘hard’ technical aspects to the consultants’ work.

It also became clear that the emphasis of the knowledge codified in the 1st Analysis Meeting had been on these ‘soft’ and ‘generic’ issues. This was perhaps not surprising given the nature of the ‘cross-analysis’ and the emphasis on grouping issues together under common headings. With the pressure of time on the participants to cover a huge number of documents, it is also not surprising that the group picked snippets which were quick and easy to pull out of the codified knowledge outputs. The predominance of ‘soft’ and ‘generic’ issues coming out of the 1st Analysis Meeting was interpreted by some as a limitation of the Knowledge Interview process to capture ‘technical’ knowledge, and by others as the neglect of some interviewers to conduct ‘technical’ interviews and produce ‘technical’ case-studies. In order to address this apparent lack of ‘technical’ knowledge which had been captured, the 2nd Analysis Meeting attempted to redress the balance by codifying an index to the ‘technical’ knowledge contained of the AKAP interview outputs. This index (a form of code) was based on the technical knowledge area of the detailed Knowledge Map. These cases therefore show that codes are developed and used during the knowledge codification process.

So far the thesis has examined how codification of knowledge in AKAP was performed first at an individual level, and then within a formal group context. The thesis will now go on to look at what happened to the knowledge which had been captured and codified by AKAP up to this point. For reasons which will become apparent in the following chapter, this next stage in the knowledge codification process is interpreted as occurring at an organisational level.

8.1 Introduction

It was shown in Chapter 5 how different organisations within the Post Office group converged around the Argentina Knowledge Capture Project, namely Post Office Consulting, British Postal Consultancy Services (a part of Post Office International), and Post Office Research Group. The Chapter introduced an historical tension between Post Office Consulting and BPCS, two competing consultancy organisations within the Post Office Group - the former offering consultancy in the Post Office internal market, and the latter managing consultancy contracts overseas.

As the funders of AKAP, Post Office Consulting and Post Office Research Group set the agenda for the project. BPCS were invited to be represented on the AKAP Board as a stakeholder in the project. Their representative did not attend the AKAP Project Initiation Meeting and made no contribution to the refinement of AKAP's planned programme of knowledge capture and deployment. It was evident that BPCS were treating this as a Post Office Consulting project, and were maintaining an involvement at arm's length.

It was also shown in Chapter 5 that the AKAP Project Manager was not prepared to allow what she perceived as 'politics' between the two organisations to get in the way of the project. For this reason the head of the Argentina Consultancy Project (and representative of Post Office International) was sidelined from any formal involvement with the project. Thus Chapter 5 introduced the organisational context within which AKAP was operating, and showed how the many participants in AKAP represented a confluence of these different organisations within the Post Office Group.

It was further shown in Chapter 6 how the behaviour of participants, and their motivation to participate in the process of codifying knowledge was influenced by their relationships with other people in an organisational context. An organisational context to the way people were codifying their knowledge was observed from 2 perspectives:

- Inter-organisational conflict - for example, a member of BPCS was not prepared to codify some aspects of her knowledge for Post Office Consulting, claiming that it ‘belongs properly’ to Post Office International
- Personal relationships in an organisational context - for example, people were reluctant to appear critical of others whom they may rely upon in future for overseas consultancy opportunities. This particularly showed through in what participants in the Knowledge Interviews would allow to go on the AKAP Electronic Filing Cabinet.

This chapter goes on to explore further the issues of knowledge codification occurring in an organisational context. The cases examined in this chapter are different from cases presented in previous chapters, which were identified as codification processes occurring under AKAP’s objective of capturing knowledge. AKAP’s approach to knowledge management was to ‘capture’ knowledge for ‘deployment’ to specific audiences. For reasons discussed in Chapters 5, 6 and 7, the prioritisation of the knowledge capture exercise around the needs of specific audiences had not occurred.

This chapter now turns to the ‘deployment’ of knowledge which was codified by AKAP. In Chapter 5 it was shown how AKAP defined ‘deployment’ as making the knowledge available or taking it to its potential users. There were two strands to AKAP’s plans for deployment:

- to make the documentation which AKAP had both captured and codified available to potential users via the AKAP Electronic Filing Cabinet

- to hold a series of workshops and presentations to invited audiences (similar to the Singapore Post Workshop) and to write articles for in-house journals and newsletters

Although these definitions for deployment may not sound like an aspect of knowledge codification, they are nevertheless seen by this thesis as part of the overall codification process which underpins AKAP's approach to knowledge management. The discussions which take place in this chapter have a clear impact upon what knowledge from Argentina AKAP was eventually able to say it had codified.

Within this chapter the End of Stage 2 Board Meeting is significant. This has been introduced in previous chapters. The meeting was held on 10 February 2000, towards the end of what AKAP defined as its knowledge capture phase. It was convened by the AKAP Project Manager in order to get the Board to take a precise view on where the project was going, to assess what had been captured so far, and to focus on specific areas of knowledge for deployment to precise audiences. It is because the Board members represent the different stakeholder organisations in AKAP - Post Office Consulting, BPCS and Post Office Research Group - that their interaction at this meeting is seen as occurring at an organisational level. The End of Stage 2 Board meeting was particularly significant, because it was the first complete gathering of the AKAP Board since the project had started. The members of the project board were:

- Bob Field, Post Office Consulting, and project sponsor
- Carol Trotter, Post Office Consulting
- Teresa Singer, Post Office Consulting
- Cynthia Houston, British Postal Consultancy Services (BPCS)
- John Macallan, Post Office Research Group

All AKAP Project Team members also attended.

The chapter is divided into two sections. The first section examines a discourse which emerged around ‘access’ and ‘ownership’ of the AKAP Electronic Filing Cabinet, or EFC. This case does not look at the process of codifying the database itself. Instead, it examines the organisational dimension which became relevant once the EFC was already codified. The discussion touches upon a long and involved discourse within the AKAP Project Team and AKAP Board over who should control access to the EFC. Eventually a political solution was reached giving joint ‘ownership’ of the database to Post Office Consulting and BPCS.¹ Despite the intention at the very outset of AKAP that this should be an EFC with ‘controlled’ rather than ‘open’ access, a narrative appeared to form within the Project Team that it was BPCS who were responsible for ‘closing off’ access to the EFC to an open audience. This shows the Project Team themselves reinforcing this apparent conflict between BPCS and Post Office Consulting.

The second section in this chapter examines a discourse which emerged at this organisational level over what knowledge from Argentina the AKAP project would be allowed to deploy. This discourse came out at the AKAP End of Stage 2 Board meeting. At this meeting it emerged that in BPCS’ view, AKAP was *only* deploying the ‘learning’ gained from applying Post Office Consulting’s KM tools, not the ‘learning’ about the Argentina Consultancy Project. BPCS strongly felt that deployment of knowledge about the Argentina Consultancy Project should be their sole responsibility. Up to this point the AKAP Project Team had been assuming that the two went hand-in-hand: The team were working towards the number one objective in the PID to ‘capture and deploy the key learning gained from the Argentina experience’ as a vehicle for discovering what the tools could do for knowledge management. As a result of this discourse, AKAP’s plans to hold workshops and presentations about ‘learning’ from the ‘Argentina experience’ were dropped. Thus it is shown how a discourse occurring within the context of organisational tension evidently affected what AKAP was able to say it had codified.

¹ The AKAP EFC was originally going to be held by Carol Trotter only, but as a result of the political discussions around ownership, joint ‘ownership’ was given to Cynthia Houston. ‘Ownership’ in the latter sense is used as a Lotus Notes technical term applied to gatekeepers of Electronic Filing Cabinets.

8.2 AKAP Electronic Filing Cabinet

At the outset of the project, the AKAP EFC was defined in its PRINCE Product Description as;

“to capture all the information, documentation and explicit knowledge available from the ‘Argentina Experience’ in a database with controlled access.”

The EFC was intended to hold “all documentation relating to the ‘Argentina Experience’ which can be captured in electronic form.” At the outset of the project it was not envisaged that the outputs from the AKAP knowledge capture process - or indeed the AKAP reports - would be added to the database. However it was subsequently decided to do so by the project team in order to have a single location for documents both captured and codified by AKAP.² The important thing to remember here is that the EFC was always supposed to have controlled access, and thus the EFC would be a safe place to store the outputs from the AKAP Knowledge Interviews.

That the EFC would have controlled access was recommended by the Project Board at the AKAP Project Initiation Meeting. This was particularly recommended by the PORG representative, John Macallan, who advised that it should not be ‘open access’ because there could well be commercially sensitive and confidential material in it. Bob Field suggested that the easiest way to get round this would be to make Carol Trotter the owner of the database and anyone wanting access would go through her.³

At the End of Stage 2 Board meeting, the discussion of the EFC raised tension among Board members over the issues of ownership and the ‘openness’ of the database. The evolution of the discussion into one of ‘ownership’ revealed an organisational level to the discourse. Cynthia and

² AKAP Tools Evaluation Report section on the EFC written by Val Kennedy

³ Project Initiation Meeting 27.10.99. Note p.80 of fieldwork journal

Carol also assumed that there would be an issue of confidentiality on the part of those who had contributed documents to the EFC, particularly Knowledge Interviewees. Carol stressed that she was not intending to hand over interview transcripts or case-studies to people going overseas, rather she expected to “pull the learning out for them.”⁴ Bob’s feeling also was that there was almost no point putting the Knowledge Interview material on the EFC, because people will not expect to have to “do the job again” of reading through the interview.⁵ It was always assumed that Carol would be the one to ‘own’ the database, that is, in the Lotus-notes sense of who acts as gatekeeper to the database and decides who else should get access. However, this was not acceptable to Cynthia Houston, from BPCS. For her it appeared to be less an issue of ‘ownership’ than one of direct access over the network. She did not want to have to ask Carol every time she wanted a document, or she did not want to have to travel from Featherstone Street up to Old Street in order to use the database herself.

It was therefore decided that Carol Trotter from Post Office Consulting, and Cynthia Houston from BPCS, would be made ‘joint owners’ of the AKAP EFC. This is outlined in an email from Patricia Dalrymple to the AKAP Project Board immediately after the End of Stage 2 Board Meeting:⁶

“OWNERS OF THE ELECTRONIC FILING CABINET:

6. It was agreed that this was not an 'ownership issue' - rather an issue of accessibility. I am, therefore recommending that, once the project team is ready to hand over the electronic filing cabinet, it is issued to both Carol Trotter and Cynthia Houston so that both parties have access to the documents contained within to share with whomever they feel appropriate. I will assume that if I hear nothing to the contrary by 28 February that this decision will stand.

⁴ Carol Trotter comment at End of Stage 2 Board meeting. Note on p.125 of fieldwork journal.

⁵ Bob Field comment at End of Stage 2 Board meeting. Note on p.125 of fieldwork journal.

⁶ Email from Patricia Dalrymple to Project Board 10.2.00 - Note that Patricia takes no response to be a decision taken.

7. With regard to whether the knowledge interviews, other interviews and questionnaire outputs should be stored on the electronic filing cabinet, I am recommending that they are stored there but that since Carol and Cynthia will both have sole editor access, it will be their individual decision as to whether they provide others with access to them or not. Once again, I will assume that if I hear nothing to the contrary by 28 February that this recommendation will stand as the 'off line' decision.”

However, it was interesting to see after the meeting a narrative emerging among the AKAP Project Team, that it was BPCS who wanted closed access and ownership of the database. A discussion over this first emerged within the Project Team on TeamWeb with regard to whether or not Teresa Singer and Andrea Campbell could have access to the AKAP EFC, given the need for confidentiality of the database.⁷

This then sparked a wider TeamWeb discussion over the wider issue of access, started by Val;

“One of the things we discussed at the analysis meeting was the question as to whether the EFC should be open to all or not. We didn't really resolve it, but Teresa was very keen that it should be open, and even said the aims of the project would be invalidated if it isn't.”⁸

Patricia then contributed;

“One of the decisions that the project board did make a long time ago.....was that the EFC would NOT be open.....Rather, it would be held by Carol Trotter and Cynthia Houston onlywho would have editor access and be able to access it for others.....However, I personally would like it to have open access I just don't think we would get it through the board because of politics.....We would also have to check all confidentiality issues with everyone who has submitted documents.....Any thoughts from others?”⁹

⁷ Original posting by Val Kennedy on 8.3.00

⁸ Posting by Val Kennedy on AKAP TeamWeb 8.3.00

⁹ Posting by Patricia Dalrymple on AKAP TeamWeb 9.3.00

Simon Mann's contribution showed how the story had become that BPCS was the one who wanted closed access to the EFC;¹⁰

“Yes, it would be nice to have open access, but I guess Cynthia would block this at the outset....and some interviewees may have concerns with this as they were told it will be held in a secure EFC (to the best of my knowledge!)”

Amy Tan was also influenced by this story about the issue over access to the EFC. This extract was taken from correspondence over the removal of Frank Chandler's questionnaire from the EFC at his request;¹¹

“I explained to him that only Carol and Cynthia would have access but that after the handover, it would be up to Carol to give Frank access to the EFC (he thought it ridiculous that it's not open access but I explained the politics involved and he understood)”

Following this exchange on TeamWeb, a considerable amount of time was spent discussing the issue over confidentiality of the AKAP material and access to the EFC at the Project Team Meeting on 24.3.00.¹² Part of the problem was that there had never been a view on how the 'knowledge' from AKAP would be held and how it would be disseminated. It was decided that it was best to consult the individuals who had their Knowledge Interview and other outputs on the AKAP EFC over the confidentiality of their documents. Therefore on March 27 2000 Patricia Dalrymple wrote to all the participants who had contributed documents, and whose interview or questionnaire outputs were contained in the EFC, to check whether they were happy if their documents, as they stand, could remain on the AKAP EFC.¹³ As a result of that email, a number of documents were removed, which were discussed in the individual cases of

¹⁰ Posting by Simon Mann on AKAP TeamWeb 9.3.00

¹¹ Email from Amy Tan to Val Kennedy 26.4.00

¹² Notes on p.158 of fieldwork journal

¹³ Email from Patricia Dalrymple to contributors to the AKAP EFC 27.3.00

Knowledge Interviews in Chapter 6. The contributors were presumably happy for all and sundry to read whatever knowledge capture outputs remained on the database. Polly later said that her Knowledge Interviewee, Rick Donaldson, never had the expectation that his Knowledge Interview material would go on an open database.¹⁴

Later on Patricia received a request from someone who wanted access to the EFC.¹⁵ He found it surprising, in view of what he had read about AKAP in a recent *In Touch* magazine, that he was denied access to the EFC. Patricia explained in her reply that the EFC was not actually finalised yet, but that when it was ‘handed over’ from AKAP, she would ask Carol Trotter to get him ‘reader access’ to the database. She then forwarded the email to Carol Trotter and used it as an opportunity to force forward the issue of open access to the EFC which the project team all felt would be the most appropriate;

“I reckon this could be an on-going nightmare and really do feel that there should be open access for the EFC. If I were you, I would run a note to Jim Marsh (as sponsor of AKAP) and asks what he thinks to giving open access to everyone in POC, (plus all BPCS people, all Correo people, all overseas people) and any others in the business who want it ...”¹⁶

This showed Patricia attempting to address the issue of the openness of the EFC right up to project closure.

However, with the status quo remaining, there was a widespread view among the Project Team that BPCS were responsible for closing off the EFC. In Polly Johnson’s opinion, even if everyone who had documents on the EFC agreed to it being open access, she believed Cynthia Houston would still not agree to it being open to all and sundry.¹⁷ Polly feels that the whole political tension between BPCS and PO Consulting resulted in the reduction of deployment of

¹⁴ Discussion of EFC at Project Evaluation Meeting 26.5.00 note on p.182 of fieldwork journal

¹⁵ Email from former Argentina Consultant forwarded to Carol Trotter and AKAP Project Team 11.05.00

¹⁶ Email from Patricia Dalrymple to Carol Trotter 11.5.00

¹⁷ Interview with Polly Johnson 16.3.00 count 1/B 010

knowledge captured by AKAP. In Simon Mann's view, Cynthia said the EFC is closed.¹⁸ "It wasn't until February, when Cynthia came on the scene, that we were told we couldn't have an open access EFC."¹⁹ Val Kennedy perceived that as a result of the End of Stage 2 Board Meeting, access to the EFC was cut back and what AKAP is allowed to put in there will be restricted.²⁰ According to Patricia Dalrymple, "the fact that only two people have access to the EFC is crazy, it should be open access to everyone."²¹ In Patricia's opinion;

"Cynthia Houston didn't want to have open access to the EFC – she wanted to hold it and have the power, if you like, to control who could get access."²²

These comments all show how the narrative was that BPCS had closed off access. In fact this was not the case. As 'owner' of the database, both Carol and Cynthia would be able to grant access to other people at their discretion. It would appear that members of the AKAP Project Team were influenced by the 'political' tension between Post Office Consulting and BPCS at an organisational level.

The AKAP Electronic Filing Cabinet has been examined here not in terms of the codifying of the database itself, but as a product of codified knowledge around which a discourse of ownership and control emerged within an organisational context.

8.3 AKAP discourse over the deployment of knowledge

This section shows how a discourse over what knowledge AKAP was able to 'deploy' emerged within this context of organisational tension between Post Office Consulting and BPCS.

¹⁸ Interview with Simon Mann 16.5.00 count 1/A 415

¹⁹ Simon Mann interview 16.5.00 count 1/A 465

²⁰ Val Kennedy interview 31.3.00 count 1/B 020

²¹ Patricia Dalrymple interview 27.4.00 count 1/A 050

²² Patricia Dalrymple interview 27.4.00 count 1/A 127

Patricia Dalrymple's hopes were high before the End of Stage 2 Board meeting that the Board would make key decisions about what knowledge to deploy and where to deploy it. She expected a high degree of specificity over this objective. In the project team meeting before the Board meeting in the afternoon, there was a buzz around what the meeting would achieve. Patricia was highly task-oriented and focused on getting results. She had drawn up a detailed list of objectives and decisions needed in the meeting, including a proposed communications plan for the project, which she wanted the Board to take a view on. She wrote these up on flip charts to take to the meeting. Some extracts from the flip charts are given here to show the level of detail she required for decisions to be made:²³

"STAGE 3 - Communication and Deployment:

- comms plan
- workshops
- presentations
- knowledge visualisation
- articles

WORKSHOPS

- Learning Zone (all locations)
 - us?
 - tools and techniques / learning
- Technology Forum (all locations)
 - visualisation
 - technical knowledge (RD / Chris A / Cynthia etc.) open up the invitation to PORG
 - softer issues and others
- Specific Workshops? (input from Board)

²³ Sent in document from Amy Tan to Project Team members on 11.2.00, the day following the Board meeting.

PRESENTATIONS

Audiences:

- BPCS
- PORG Management Team Ask Board
- POI ??”

Patricia and the Project Team believed up to this point that there was still going to be deployment of two ‘streams’ of knowledge from AKAP:

- knowledge about the Argentina Consultancy Project
- and knowledge which AKAP had gained around putting Post Office Consulting’s KM tools into practice.

These had been the dual objectives in the Project Initiation Document.

As the meeting got underway, Patricia started by going through each of the stage 2 projects in order to give an update on what had been done and what was still outstanding. She then put up the flip charts on the team’s plans for deployment channels shown above. The communications plan raised the first question from Bob Field. He wanted to know what the team were communicating, suggesting that the communication is about the AKAP project and the “Knowledge Management approach to it, but [looking over at Cynthia] not what went on in Argentina.” Cynthia confirmed that she believed the communication to be about the AKAP project and the process of Knowledge Management: There was, she said, already a communications plan for Argentina. Cynthia also made it clear that she wanted to postpone the issue of deploying knowledge from Argentina due to a critical review which her organisation was currently undergoing, and that it was too early to be discussing it. There was never any discussion around whether AKAP would be involved in that deployment process.

During this discussion there were explicit references made to the organisational tension between BPCS and PO Consulting, with Cynthia saying “I would never allow anything to go out with Malcolm Hart’s name at the bottom of it” (Malcolm Hart was the head of Post Office Consulting at the time) and Bob Field agreeing that “Malcolm Hart would sack me if I made any association between him and Argentina.”²⁴ There was clearly no decisions going to be made over the deployment of knowledge at the meeting. Bob recommended that any such decisions be made ‘offline.’

Following the meeting, Patricia was furious at the way it had gone, in particular, the lack of decision making by the Board. As a result of this she retrenched into her role as Project Manager, took the Board at their word over what knowledge AKAP could deploy, and retained in the project plan only the deliverables which were related to what AKAP had ‘learned’ about using the Post Office Consulting’s KM tools. Patricia said she felt that during the meeting Cynthia and Bob were not having an honest conversation - “that’s why I made the decision on their behalf in the end.”²⁵ So basically, the cutting back of deployment plans was Patricia’s response to the tension between Post Office Consulting and BPCS played out at that meeting. She later admitted that she explicitly made the decision to cut back the deployment plans.²⁶ Even though there might have been more diplomatic ways of proceeding with AKAP’s deployment plans, Patricia was not prepared for the project to be kicked around like a ‘political football’ and therefore cut back on the plan. In the end AKAP delivered 3 presentations (on the use of Knowledge Interviews and Knowledge Visualisation), whereas in drawing up the project plan, Patricia had envisaged 8 presentations and 5 or 6 workshops.²⁷

²⁴ Both quotes noted in loose field notes in AKAP Board meeting 10 Feb 2000.doc. The tension between BPCS and Post Office Consulting was later explained by a number of people in Post Office Consulting to be an issue going back about 18 months where there was a big row between the two organisations over the organisation of work, culminating in Malcolm Hart forbidding anyone in Post Office Consulting to do any work for BPCS, which he later retracted. This specific account was given by Teresa Singer in interview 17.3.00

²⁵ Patricia Dalrymple interview 27.4.00 count 1/A 152

²⁶ Patricia Dalrymple interview 27.4.00 count 1/A 052

²⁷ Patricia Dalrymple interview 27.4.00 count 1/A 190

An email from Patricia Dalrymple to the Project Board following the End of Stage 2 Board Meeting set out the new organisational parameters of the knowledge codified by AKAP:²⁸

“COMMUNICATION & DEPLOYMENT:

1. The AKAP project team will be responsible for the communication of the AKAP project in terms of raising awareness of the AKAP project itself and of the tools used within the project. It is, and will continue to be, the responsibility of BPCS to deliver communications about the Argentina assignment.
2. The AKAP project team will be responsible for the deployment of the learning related to the tools used - in the context of Argentina as the case study. Deployment of all other learning i.e. specifically related to Argentina, will be the responsibility of BPCS. I will assume that this recommendation is agreed by the project board unless I hear otherwise by 28 February.”

Following the meeting, the mood among the AKAP Project Team was gloomy, particularly as it now appeared AKAP was to be restricted over what it could say about Argentina. In Simon Mann’s view, Cynthia Houston put the ‘kybosh’ on PO Consulting saying anything about what was captured from AKAP - “We’re not allowed to tell anyone in PO Consulting what we’ve captured from Argentina.”²⁹ He attributes this to the conflict between PO Consulting and BPCS.

Val Kennedy also attributed the scaling back of the deployment plans in AKAP to in-fighting between PO Consulting and BPCS at this meeting.³⁰ Val was particularly disappointed about cutting back on the presentations and workshops.

²⁸ Email from Patricia Dalrymple to Project Board 10.2.00

²⁹ Simon Mann interview 16.5.00 count 1/B 395

³⁰ Val Kennedy interview 31.3.00 count 1/B 005

“... a large part of workshops and presentations is getting people to know you exist and that knowledge is there, and there are people who have learned these things. And while you can write up articles, presentations have more impact.”³¹

In Patricia’s view, the whole effectiveness of the AKAP project was compromised by ‘politics’ between BPCS and PO Consulting, and attributes the scaling back of deployment plans due to this.³²

Teresa Singer claimed she was shocked at the tension between Bob and Cynthia at the Board Meeting, but did not feel able to challenge the prevailing assumption that the knowledge should not be freely available.³³ To her mind, restricting what the project was allowed to say was counter to the whole basis of AKAP.

John Macallan’s perception of Cynthia from the End of Stage 2 Board Meeting was that she wanted ‘ownership’ of the knowledge from Argentina; “She doesn’t want to know what’s going on in Argentina, she wants to control it.”³⁴

Bob Field also recognised that the cut back of AKAP’s deployment plans was to do with politics, and considered this to be a good example of a power issue around Knowledge Management. In his opinion this was due to BPCS saying ‘If I’m not telling this story, then no-one’s telling this story.’³⁵ However, Bob’s view was not necessarily that the deployment plans should be curtailed because of BPCS - his response would have been to proceed “more subtly.” However, he was prepared to accept the situation as it stood, recognising that PO Consulting must co-operate within the boundaries laid down by its parent organisation:

³¹ Val Kennedy interview 31.3.00 count 1/B 033

³² Patricia Dalrymple interview 27.4.00 count 1/A 025

³³ Teresa Singer interview 17.3.00 count 1/A 370

³⁴ Interview with John Macallan 31.3.00 count 1/B 310

³⁵ Bob Field interview 17.5.00 count 1/A 155

“The organisation has decided ... who is responsible for what. Overseas consultancy is led by BPCS through PO International. Even if we gather [the knowledge] and develop it in terms of making it public, we don’t have a right to do it by ourselves. It would be like POI doing a study into Railnet ... we would say, ‘what are you doing presenting on our thing.’”³⁶

It is tempting to speculate that if Cynthia Houston had made it to the AKAP Project Initiation Meeting in October 1999, where the project objectives and plan were discussed at length, then she might have been able to predict BPCS’ response to AKAP’s proposed plans to ‘capture and deploy key knowledge from the Argentina experience.’ This may have saved the Project Team some time in prioritising their objectives with a better idea of BPCS views as a stakeholder in the project.

8.4 Concluding section

Unlike the previous analytical chapters - which examined processes of knowledge codification as they were occurring - this chapter took a slightly different view of the codification of knowledge which AKAP effected within its’ approach to knowledge management. This chapter examined what happened to the product of AKAP, that is, the knowledge which was codified in order to be ‘deployed’ to its audiences: The AKAP Electronic Filing Cabinet contained all the documents captured and codified by the project, and therefore represents one of the project’s key deliverables. The chapter also looked at what AKAP was proposing to deploy in terms of workshops, presentations and articles about knowledge from the Argentina Consultancy Project, and the use of the KM tools to capture it. The chapter showed how tensions at the organisational level resulted in restrictions on what AKAP was able to say it had codified.

However, what AKAP was able to say it had codified about the Argentina Consultancy Project was a different matter from what had already actually been codified by AKAP. The consultants

³⁶ Bob Field interview 17.5.00 count 1/A 200

in the Knowledge Interviews had talked quite freely and, in some cases, had been quite critical of BPCS and the management of the Argentina Consultancy Project. They did, however, show reticence at some of this knowledge reaching people who had influence within the Post Office, that is, if certain people got hold of their interview transcripts or case-studies.

It is interesting to note that BPCS' intervention in what AKAP was able to 'deploy' appeared to occur only once there was something tangible - a codified product - as an object of ownership or control. Thus BPCS were interested in having joint ownership and direct access to the AKAP EFC. But it was also apparent at the Board Meeting - from the Post-It notes stuck up from the 1st Analysis Meeting - that what people had said about BPCS and the management of the Argentina Consultancy Project was not all favourable. Post Office Consulting now had this knowledge about the Argentina Consultancy Project, but BPCS were not going to allow them to communicate it.

It has been interesting to observe how this discourse about who could deploy what knowledge only appeared to occur once there was a codified product. It might be concluded that the object of conflict at this organisational level was not the process, but the product of knowledge codification. BPCS showed no signs of intervention during the processes of knowledge codification which arrived at the products presented at the End of Stage 2 Board Meeting.

Throughout AKAP there are the clear signs that the relationships between people in an organisational context affect processes of knowledge codification, both in terms of what they are prepared to codify, and what they are prepared to happen to the codified product. This has been shown in previous chapters, and has been reinforced here. In this chapter it was particularly noticeable how the AKAP Project Team were influenced by this apparent organisational conflict between Post Office Consulting and BPCS. However, this may have been more apparent than real: Notwithstanding the actual conflict which exists between these organisations, in the case of the EFC it appeared to be used by the Project Team to rationalise

what had happened over the discourse over access to the database. Furthermore, the project team attributed the scaling back of AKAP's deployment plans to BPCS, rather than to the Project Manager's response of cutting the deployment plans out of AKAP. There may well have been ways for Post Office Consulting and BPCS to cooperate over a Singapore Post-style workshop within the framework of AKAP, but such options were ruled out of the project plan.

In the next chapter the thesis moves beyond the formal boundaries of AKAP, to examine cases of knowledge codification which can be seen occurring within informal groups.

9.1 Introduction

Previous chapters have examined processes of knowledge codification which occurred within the context of the Argentina Knowledge Capture Project. These were presented as cases of a managed approach to the codification of knowledge, and were all constituted in formal, albeit temporary, relationships.

This chapter now turns to examine processes of knowledge codification occurring within informal groups. The term ‘informal’ was used in the title of this chapter as a contrast with the formal group approach adopted by AKAP to codifying the knowledge of consultants from Argentina. Some of the evidence in this chapter is still highly situated in the AKAP case material, but by definition, it is necessary to look beyond the formally bound case study data in order to see an informal dimension to knowledge codification at work. It should be noted that this informal dimension to knowledge codification was observed within Post Office Consulting. This discussion is still within an organisational context.

First it is necessary to outline some terminology. In Chapter 2 the importance of the informal organisation as a dimension in the codification of knowledge was suggested by the concept of ‘communities of practice’. These are essentially groupings of people who share knowledge, interest and practice which transcend formal organisational structures. Chapter 2 showed that the ‘communities of practice’ literature is quite extensive, but does not discuss the codification of knowledge per se. Wenger’s (1998) discussion of ‘reification’ is probably a related concept to codification. As Wenger (1998) suggests, “communities of practice can be thought of as shared histories of learning.” They also have boundaries and define exclusivity, in the sense that members share knowledge and experience expressed through language which may be

unintelligible to someone outside the community. Although this thesis does not go into the ‘communities of practice’ literature in any great depth, the concept is used as having relevance to the knowledge codification process.

This chapter therefore examines codification of knowledge occurring at this informal level, but looking within the organisational context, rather than extending the discussion to knowledge bases which occur within the wider context of social knowledge. In the analysis presented in this chapter, the term ‘community’ is generally adopted,¹ rather than ‘informal group’ because the sense of ‘community’ conveys what is intended: These are groups of people within the organisation, who share some similar interest, experience and knowledge, and who may actively identify with each other because of their similarities. There are different modes of community membership, for example, some members are more active and some more passive. Members may be aware or unaware that they are a part of the community. Some may feel more part of the community than others. This chapter has a mixture of types, although the objective is not to differentiate community ‘types.’ The objective of the chapter is to discuss the codification of knowledge in the context of such informal groups.

This chapter draws upon two main ‘communities’ and examines cases of knowledge codification within them. The first section examines the ‘Knowledge Interviews community’ within Post Office Consulting. This community of interviewers was brought together around the AKAP project, and the cases of Knowledge Interviews conducted by these Post Office Consulting practitioners were presented in Chapter 6. This community is discussed in the context of the codification of the Knowledge Interview technique. The case considers the role of a ‘core group’ who codified the technique, and looks at how it has been used by the wider community of practitioners: The evidence from the AKAP Knowledge Interview cases is that the technique was interpreted in a wide range of ways and adapted to different circumstances. It

¹ The thesis does not use the term ‘communities of practice’ because ‘community’ is less complicated, and conveys the desired message.

is suggested that the Knowledge Interview technique was not as codified as its developers believed.

The second main analytical section of this chapter examines the ‘Knowledge Management community’ in Post Office Consulting. It is suggested that the ‘story’ about KM in Post Office Consulting, which is told by key representatives of KM in the organisation to the outside world, has been codified by a small number of key KM enthusiasts who have influence in the organisation, and have driven through a programme of knowledge management. This vision of KM in the organisation is not necessarily shared by everyone. However, some people clearly identify with the KM approach in an informal way. This case examines how certain instances of knowledge codification link people at this informal level.

9.2 The Knowledge Interviews community in Post Office Consulting

This section looks at the codification of the Knowledge Interview technique, and how the technique was applied in AKAP. The codification of the Knowledge Interview technique was performed by a small group of practitioners, who were originally formally linked in order to develop and codify a Knowledge Interview technique for Post Office Consulting.

However, they are more than a group coming together to develop a KM tool, they clearly identify with each other’s ideas and approaches to the technique. They are referred to here as the core Knowledge Interview group. It is their job to train other practitioners as Knowledge Interviewers, and thus to ‘transfer’ the use of the technique. When it is this core group conducting the Knowledge Interviews, they believe there is a homogeneity in what they produce. However, when the use of the technique moves away from this core grouping and into the wider community of trained Knowledge Interviewers, as in the AKAP case, this is characterised by a much greater heterogeneity in what they produce. From this observation it is

possible to question whether they have codified the technique outside their immediate community.

9.2.1 Codification of the Knowledge Interview technique

The Knowledge Interview technique was a tool developed within Post Office Consulting's KM Programme by three people - Philip Connelly, Gary Dalton and Teresa Singer. The initiative was started in Spring 1998 by Philip Connelly on his own. A few months later he felt that he needed extra resource so Teresa Singer joined him, followed by Gary Dalton a few months after that. This was formally a formal group, although the group disbanded when the product was complete, coming together for the purpose of Knowledge Interview training workshops. This core grouping was later joined by Andrea Campbell in the following year.

The codification of the Knowledge Interview technique occurred in order to establish it as a KM tool, and to set out the procedures which define it as a process. The technique is also codified in its supporting documentation, which is used in the Knowledge Interview training workshop. In this way, the codification of the KI technique also occurred in order to facilitate the use of the tool by other trained knowledge interviewers - in effect, to facilitate transfer of the technique to other practitioners, in combination with the training workshop.

As shown in Chapter 3, the Knowledge Interview was developed as a tool to capture the tacit knowledge [sic] of experts as they move in and out of the organisation and between projects - hence it used to be known as the Entry-Expert-Exit interview. Figure 3.4 set out the established structure to the Knowledge Interview, known as 'the cognitive approach' and 'the management of conversation.' This section goes on to describe the process in a little more detail.

It was also briefly mentioned in Chapter 3 that when scoping up the technique, Philip looked at various models, including software-based approaches for capturing knowledge e.g. HyperKnowledge. However, Philip and Teresa went for the interview-based approach rather than the software alternatives: Although Philip recognised that the software option had the advantage of linking in with existing documentation produced by the expert, the interview was more conducive to the surfacing of ‘gems’ from the interviewee. For the time being, the interview would be recorded and the issue of how to deal with the output would be considered later.²

The technique and process of the Knowledge Interview is set out in the documentation supporting the tool. There are 2 booklets which are both entitled ‘Workshop Manuals.’ The first manual gives the slides from the Knowledge Interview training workshops, and provides pro-formas of the documentation supporting the interview:

- a Request for Knowledge Capture Form
- Pre-Interview Check Sheet
- a proposed Interview Map - suggesting areas of people, information sources, learning points, change/time, value, behaviour/ approach
- a pro-forma Interview Schedule - organised by topics, each to be approached first by ‘cognitive recall’ then by ‘management of conversation.’

The second manual describes the Knowledge Interview process. It shows how the Knowledge Interview fits between ‘review’ and ‘capture’ in Post Office Consulting’s Knowledge Process Model (see Figure 3.1 in Chapter 3).

The approach to the Knowledge Interview has 3 key stages:

² Philip Connelly interview 22.3.99

Pre interview ⇒ Interview ⇒ Analysis

The documentation explains how, before the Knowledge Interview, it is necessary to assemble any relevant documentation, for example, the interviewee's CV or project documentation. It is also necessary to conduct a pre-interview. As the workshop manual explains, "the pre-interview is very much an informal 20-30 minutes when the engagement begins. This provides the opportunity to gain input from the interviewee and explain the process."

The explanation of the main interview process was given in Figure 3.4. There is not much more information than that given in the manual on how to conduct the main interview. This is how Teresa Singer verbally described the Knowledge Interview process;

"So the first part of the interview is kind of an unstructured interview, but it's based upon a very specific area, and it's cognitive recall ... it's really just opening up the memory, and it's tell me a little bit about the story, tell me a little bit about your involvement on this marketing project. Once you've got that recall, and you probe ... you then go to the second stage which is about managing this conversation a bit more along the focus of culture, with the focus on behaviour, learning points, contacts and so forth ... And people come back and say, oh yes, I never I thought I did that, and this is when you get to a lot of the tacit stuff, so you allow them to recall and then you manage the recall in certain directions."³

The workshop manual then turns to 'analysis' of the interview output. Analysis is described as;

"The process of analysis is one of familiarisation with the transcript. To effectively analyse this, it is often necessary to read the transcript a number of times. Analysis encompasses a way to organise the text. Minor and major concepts from the text are 'taken out' of the transcript and supporting evidence for those concepts is sought. Whenever possible, the concepts should be described in the words of the interviewee. Following this, the next step is to group the concepts into categories and to explain the

³ Teresa Singer interview 23.3.99 p.21 of interview transcript

relationships between concepts and concepts, concepts and categories and amongst the categories. The analysis could be graphically represented or in bullet points.”

The manual also gives some advice on writing case-studies:

Writing Case studies

Turning the analysis into a case-study, the author has to ask him/herself two questions:

- Who is the audience?
- What is the information the interviewee wants to get across?

Depending on the answers to these two questions, the case study needs to be drafted. Generally in most organisations there is information overload. Brevity is therefore advisable when writing a case study.

Headings

All case studies should contain headings such as introduction, or background and learning points at either end of the document. The main concepts or categories gained from the analysis stage often provide suitable headings for the middle part of the case study. Aim for a minimum number of headings and consider which ones should be grouped together.

Language

Clarity and brevity are the best ways to ensure that the case study will be read by the audience. However, the author has to make a decision between the richness of the text provided by the transcript and the necessity of producing a concise case study. It is useful to consult an example (such as the case studies produced by the Royal Statistical Society).

It is interesting to note that throughout this documentation there is no mention of the issue of how the Knowledge Interview deals with ‘technical’ knowledge. It was shown how the discourse over technical knowledge and the Knowledge Interview technique arose in Chapters 6 and 7. It was also brought up by Teresa Singer, one of the developers of the Knowledge Interview technique, at the End of Stage 2 Board meeting, where she referred to a set of cases from the AKAP Knowledge Interviews, where the interviewer had really exemplified the Knowledge Interview technique by producing a set of ‘work specifications.’ However, there is

nothing in the Knowledge Interview documentation to suggest that this is what the aim of the Knowledge Interview is. It would appear that the technique, as described above, is open to considerable interpretation.

9.2.2 Use of the Knowledge Interview technique in AKAP

AKAP was funded first and foremost as an opportunity to apply the Knowledge Interviews technique to a live project environment, and to see how the technique would stand up to rigorous use. The application of the Knowledge Interview technique to the Argentina project represented the use of the technique in a novel way. It was also an opportunity for a community of newly trained Knowledge Interviewers to develop their experience of using this technique for real, beyond the cursory experience of the technique they had received at the Knowledge Interview training workshop.

It is evident in Chapter 6 that the Knowledge Interview technique, when applied by this wider community, showed a considerable degree of heterogeneity in the outputs from the process. Indeed when Teresa, a codifier of the technique, saw the outputs from the AKAP Knowledge Interviews she was agitated. She thought “what the hell are you doing, I trained these people ... what’s wrong.” Her interpretation of what had happened was that the AKAP Knowledge Interviewers were not following the established structure.⁴ Her interpretation was that the knowledge of the technique had “gone in intellectually, but not behaviourally.”⁵

Andrea Campbell, one of the AKAP Knowledge Interviewers, also interpreted the variability of the AKAP Knowledge Interview outputs in terms of people veering away from the established

⁴ Teresa Singer interview 17.3.00 count 1/A 160

⁵ Teresa Singer interview 17.3.00 count 1/A 290

structure of the process. She said it seemed to her that they were focusing almost entirely on the ‘management of conversation’; she could see very little evidence of ‘cognitive recall.’⁶

When talking afterwards about how the Knowledge Interview process had gone, another of the Knowledge Interviewers, Fran Heath, tried to repeat the terminology used in the Knowledge Interview documentation by talking about “cognitive vs. the probe” then talks about “getting on to the cognitive.”⁷

Martin Healey also talked about how hard he had tried to follow the Knowledge Interview documentation, but found it shrouded in ‘too many intellectualisms.’⁸

The AKAP Knowledge Interview cases showed the interviewers trying hard to make the process work in the absence of clear guidelines over why they were doing it. Thus the production of the case-study was particularly problematic, given that they did not know who the audience was. However, the Knowledge Interview documentation did not help, and many interviewers talked about the ‘analysis’ process being deficient in the Knowledge Interview training.

9.2.3 Codification of the Knowledge Interview technique within the ‘core group’

When reflecting upon this perceived variation between the codified structure of the Knowledge Interview, and the variation of its application in AKAP, Teresa Singer felt that when it was just her, Philip and Gary conducting the interviews - i.e. the developers of the technique - their Knowledge Interview outputs were quite similar.⁹ Furthermore, when Andrea Campbell joined the group, Teresa believes she adopted a similar approach giving her the illusion that the

⁶ Andrea Campbell interview 28.3.00 count 1/A 630

⁷ Fran Heath interview 17.3.00 count 1/A 100

⁸ Martin Healey interview 27.3.00

⁹ Teresa Singer interview 17.3.00 count 1/A 089.

technique had been effectively transferred.¹⁰ Teresa believes that there is a distinct structure to the Knowledge Interview process, but the KI trainees had not had a chance to reinforce the structure during their KI training, and this resulted in the Interviewers ignoring the structure and adopting their own style.¹¹ In Teresa's opinion, the structure determines the output.¹²

In the above section it was shown how Andrea, a member of this core group, also talked about AKAP interviewers straying from the established process of cognitive recall and management of conversation. Her use of the same language suggests that Andrea is similar to this core group. When she joined the core group, Teresa believes Andrea "took to it like a duck to water."¹³ Furthermore, the particular set of case-studies which Teresa was referring to as exemplars of the technique in AKAP were produced by Andrea Campbell.

When it came to AKAP, however, there was a much greater variation in Teresa's perception of the quality of the interview output, and variation from what she considers to be the established structure of the interview. Perhaps this is showing what occurs when the technique, which is perceived to be codified within the core group, moves out to the wider community of practitioners who have been trained in the Knowledge Interview technique. It is also interesting to observe Teresa Singer's remarks about how, as a result of the AKAP experience of how Knowledge Interviews were used, she would prefer now to "make the KI community smaller".¹⁴

The concepts of 'management of conversation' and 'cognitive recall' are really open to considerable interpretation, and it is therefore perhaps unrealistic to suppose that simply by reading the terms, people will know what they are meant to do. It is not surprising that the technique was subject to variation. This was, after all, the first time the technique had been used *en masse* in one project. This discussion of the how the Knowledge Interview core group used

¹⁰ Teresa Singer interview 17.3.00 count 1/A 100

¹¹ Teresa Singer interview 17.3.00 count 1/A 114

¹² Teresa Singer interview 17.3.00 all this discussion before and after tape count 1/A 100

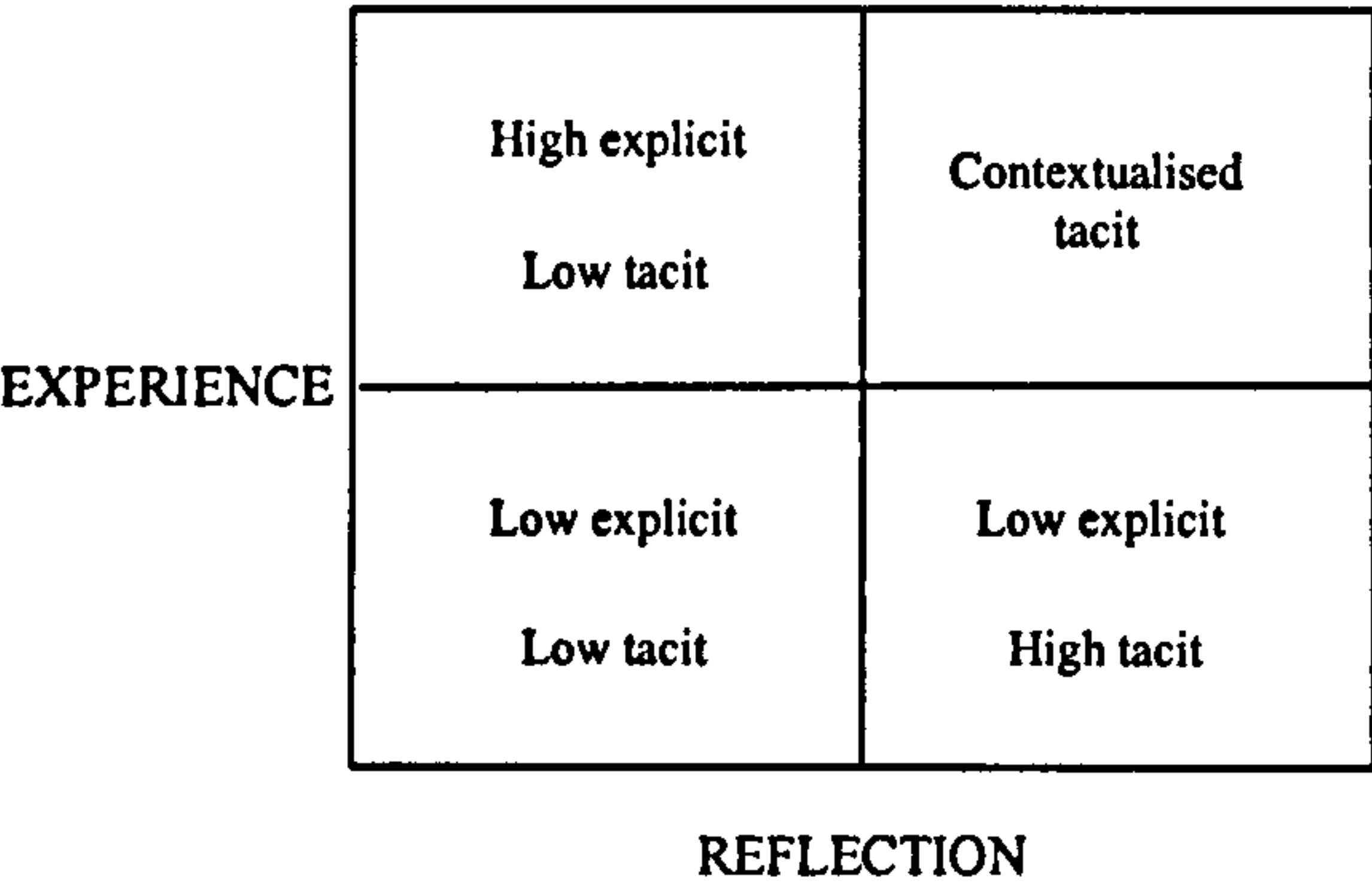
¹³ Teresa Singer interview 17.3.00 count 1/A 100

¹⁴ Teresa Singer interview 17.3.00 count 1/B 147

the tool suggests that they have a common understanding of the concepts underlying the way the Knowledge Interview technique is codified.

This is also shown in the following Knowledge Interview ‘model’ which appears in the workshop slides as what the interview process is trying to achieve:

Figure 9.1 Post Office Consulting’s ‘Knowledge Interview Model 1’



Philip describes how, when the core group were talking about what type of knowledge the technique is trying to get at, Gary produced this ‘model’ in order to capture what they as a group were wanting to convey;

“Greg said ... I need a picture to explain it to myself ... and he produced that and said, well what do you think, and actually for all three of us it explained it in a simple and nice way, about what we were trying to do and what our approach was.”¹⁵

¹⁵ Philip Connelly interview 22.3.99 p.9 of interview transcript

It can be seen that this ‘model’ is not, on its own, necessarily understandable to someone outside this core group. The ‘model’ may show how the core group have codified the technique, but an outsider will not necessarily interpret it in the same way. This observation suggests that codification is occurring within a core group of practitioners who share similar understandings of the process. However, this understanding was not necessarily shared by the wider community of Knowledge Interviewers who came together for AKAP.

Other participants in AKAP who were not Knowledge Interviewers remarked on what they perceived as the lack of an established process to the Knowledge Interview.

For example, Val Kennedy, an AKAP project team member, remarked;

“I suppose the actual process of the Knowledge Interview surprised me, having this 5 or 6 hour brain dump ... the other aspect which surprised me was you didn’t know what you did with it once you’d got your 5 or 6 hour brain dump ... I had assumed again, perhaps naively, that this was a well-established process.”¹⁶

She also said that what she had read about Post Office Consulting led her to believe that “hundreds of these interviews had been done.” It was not until the first AKAP interview outputs were produced did she “begin to twig that the process was not well-defined.”¹⁷ Similarly she was surprised by the need for an analysis meeting, assuming prior to AKAP that the movement from capturing the knowledge and producing the AKAP Learning Summary Report was all part of Post Office Consulting’s “black box process” which was already well established.

Chris Arthur talked about the Knowledge Interview in a similar way.¹⁸ What he had heard about Knowledge Interviews led him to believe that there must be many good examples to look at. In

¹⁶ Val Kennedy interview 31.3.00 count 1/A 357-375

¹⁷ Val Kennedy interview 31.3.00 count 1/A 418

¹⁸ Chris Arthur interview 29.9.00 count 1/B 200

the event he had to really push Patricia to give him an example. Chris was not impressed by the example she finally gave him - “it was almost like an autobiography than helping you understand a different way of thinking or doing something.”

The actual level of codification of the Knowledge Interview technique would appear to be at variance with the expectations built up in Chapter 3 that this was a technique tried and tested. AKAP in fact represented the first project where the Knowledge Interview technique had been applied *en masse*. Previous use of the technique had only been as ‘one-offs.’ The Singapore Post Knowledge Management project’s use of the Knowledge Interview technique had not produced any visible results, despite the Director and General Manager of Post Office Consulting’s claims that “it is with Singapore that we are using our knowledge management box of tricks - using processes and technology to capture key learning.”¹⁹ In this article, a diagram appears which shows how the Singapore Post Knowledge Management Project mobilised the transfer of knowledge to other projects, when the consultants involved were not able to move onto other projects themselves. The diagram serves to create the impression that this knowledge transfer has successfully taken place as a result of the Singapore Post Knowledge Management project.

So it can be seen that the reality of the Knowledge Interview technique is different from the expectations that were built up among non-Post Office Consulting people, that the Knowledge Interview technique was far more well established. The chapter now goes on to look more widely at the codification of Knowledge Management within Post Office Consulting.

9.3 The Knowledge Management community in Post Office Consulting

This case examines knowledge codification in a ‘Knowledge Management community’ in Post Office Consulting. The research aimed to examine processes of knowledge codification in an organisation grappling with ideas about knowledge management. For this reason, the research

¹⁹ Article in *White Space*, Post Office internal management magazine, 1999

was conducted almost entirely around a set of practitioners either practising or actively interested in KM. Although this chapter focuses on Post Office Consulting, these KM enthusiasts were found across the other Post Office organisations. This can be expected given the informal nature of the community - they are practitioners linked by a common enthusiasm for the principles and practice of knowledge management. Some of them like to talk explicitly about Knowledge Management and are clearly influenced by the KM phenomenon, while others are enthusiastic about the principles of knowledge management albeit wary about the KM label, preferring to see it more simply as a better way of working.

Within this KM community a core group is identified, who appear to have assumed for themselves the task of codifying the approach to Knowledge Management for Post Office Consulting. This group is called the 'KM key thinkers and shapers' because they are senior managers with influence in the organisation, who have mobilised a KM programme. Although some have become formalised in their roles, this is nevertheless seen as an informal group who share an interest and understanding about KM. In a sense this is similar to a core group identified in the Knowledge Interviews community. This case also discusses how the codification of knowledge about KM and the codification of a KM approach is taking place within an informal core grouping or community of practitioners.

In the same way that the previous examination of the Knowledge Interviews community focused on the codification of a technique, this case also looks at the nature of knowledge codification within the KM community. Therefore, after introducing the KM community and a core grouping within it, the discussion turns to two specific instances of knowledge codification: The codification of Post Office Consulting's 'journey to become a knowledge organisation' and the codification of the Post Office Consulting Knowledge Process Model.

9.3.1 Formal and informal KM groups

This section will show that the Knowledge Management community in Post Office Consulting does not necessarily align with the formal Knowledge Management Practitioner Group. The organisational home for this research was the Knowledge Management Practitioner Group and it was clear that there were people in the Practitioner Group who were not practising KM consultancy. Conversely, there were people practising KM consultancy who were not in the KM Practitioner Group.

As the Practitioner Group Leader explains, when the KM Practitioner Group was set up “there was a huge amount of gelling problems, because we were put together as a PG and nobody bloody knew what Knowledge Management was - Malcolm Hart decided there will be a Practitioner Group.”²⁰ Malcolm Hart was the DGM of Post Office Consulting who spearheaded the change programme in 1997 which saw the ‘abandonment’ of line management, and introduced a structure more conducive to the flow of ‘knowledge.’ This was covered in the section in Chapter 3 on Post Office Consulting’s ‘journey to become a knowledge organisation.’ He formalised a KM Practitioner Group as a way of delivering his vision for Post Office Consulting to work as a ‘knowledge organisation.’

According to one member of the Practitioner Group, KM was where a number of people were put who did not clearly fit into any of the other Practitioner Group areas of expertise. During this research, for example, a group of information systems people within Post Office Consulting were moved out of KM into a different Practitioner Group. Polly Johnson, one of two people within the Practitioner Group with Communications roles (e.g. producing Post Office Consulting news), did not know why Comms was in the KM Practitioner Group. Her colleague told her that at the last re-organisation, they were located in the KM Practitioner Group because

²⁰ Patricia Dalrymple interview 10.6.99 p.11 of interview transcript

no one knew where else to put them.²¹ The Comms section was later moved to the Commercial Management and Enterprise Practitioner Group. The question of where to place people would appear to be quite common as the KM Practitioner Group leader explains about her previous role;

“I was never in the KM PG, I was in Distribution PG, that’s right, when I joined the Executive Committee there was no PG for me to be in really, and I was plonked in Commercial Management and Enterprise, as a kind of token ... you’ve got to have a home somewhere.”²²

Furthermore not all Knowledge Management practitioners are a part of the formal KM Practitioner Group. A good example is Derek Cresswell from the Materials Handling Practitioner Group who managed the Singapore Post Knowledge Management project. Teresa Singer, who as developer of the KM technique is clearly a KM practitioner, was also previously in the Materials Handling Practitioner Group before moving formally to the KM group because she felt more ‘at home’.

In the early days of reorganisation, it is to be expected that there will be some fluidity before people resettle in their more appropriate organisational homes. Since then the KM Practitioner Group has been working hard at trying to establish an agreement about how they are approaching Knowledge Management as a group, and what consultancy products or expertise they are selling.

In terms of whether the work of the PG is ‘knowledge management’, Paul Butcher - head of the Knowledge Programme and member of the KM group - believes that the Knowledge Management Practitioner Group will chase any work as long as it’s revenue, irrespective of

²¹ Polly Johnson interview 16.3.00 count 2/163

²² Patricia Dalrymple interview 10.6.99 p.4 of interview transcript

whether or not it is actually ‘knowledge management.’²³ However, it is clear that the KM Practitioner Group had not actively defined its market for KM. What *is* Knowledge Management is not codified within the Practitioner Group. Furthermore, the new organisational structure forces PGs to get work just in order to fulfil their ‘contribution’ to consultancy revenue. These points highlight the difficulty of having a formal group of 38 people dedicated to Knowledge Management when ‘knowledge management’ itself is not defined, and the group itself is a hybrid taken from other groupings before the KM Practitioner Group was formally formed. As Andrea Campbell says of Knowledge Management in the Practitioner Group, she is not sure what “our interpretation is ... it’s almost like we make anything fit.”²⁴

9.3.2 *KM ‘key thinkers and shapers’*

The KM ‘key thinkers and shaper’ can be seen as the key senior managers in Post Office Consulting, who drove through a knowledge theme in the reorganisation and subsequently shaped the organisation’s formal approach to Knowledge Management. As shown in Chapter 3, they were also telling the story about Post Office Consulting’s ‘journey to become a knowledge organisation’ to the outside world, representing Post Office Consulting at a number of high-level conferences. As Bob Field suggests “our people are very prominent in this fashion show.”²⁵.

There were four people identified in this group of KM key thinkers and shapers, who were interviewed initially for the Open University’s case-study. They are:

- Malcolm Hart – Director and General Manager of Post Office Consulting
- Bob Field – Knowledge Director of Post Office Consulting

²³ Paul Butcher interview 3.8.00 count 1/B 180

²⁴ Andrea Campbell interview 28.3.00 count 1/A 255

²⁵ Bob Field interview 11.12.98 p.9 of interview transcript

- Paul Butcher – Post Office Consulting’ Knowledge Core Process Manager (and head of the Knowledge Programme
- Tim Bray – member of KM Practitioner Group and key ‘thinker’ around the shape and structure of the Knowledge Programme

While there is a formal KM programme in Post Office Consulting, it can be seen that the codification of knowledge about KM – that is, the knowledge underlying the formation of this approach – occurred within this core informal group, who provided the chief intellectual stimulus and drove the approach through strategically.

Tim Bray explains how this ‘thinking’ was conducted;

“... you’ll find that a lot of the thinking, especially around the learning organisation and all the stuff on the knowledge integration strand has been done primarily through TeamWeb application.”²⁶

Some of this thinking has taken place within this core group using a TeamWeb which, in essence, defines the informal grouping. The ‘thinking’ took place within TeamWeb, and thus anyone not using TeamWeb could not contribute.

Furthermore Tim talks about ‘me and Paul’ as if they *are* the Knowledge Programme.²⁷ When asked who he means by ‘we’ he explains;

“The pro ... me and Paul. The programme. Oh no, sorry, that sounds terrible, me and Paul being the Programme. The programme ...”²⁸

²⁶ Tim Bray interview 12.4.99 p.5 of interview transcript

²⁷ Tim Bray interview 12.4.99 p.3 of interview transcript

²⁸ Tim Bray interview 12.4.99 p.11 of interview transcript

Here are two more examples from Tim, which suggests he talks about his own understanding, and this core group's understanding as if they represent KM in the organisation:

“My view, and I think the view of the Programme, is that if Knowledge Management as a separate issue is still on the agenda to the extent it is now in five years time, then we've failed.”²⁹

“Our thinking doesn't change as radically these days, because I think we're happy that we're down the personalisation route, so that high-level strategy about putting people in touch with people and information is constant.”³⁰

This examination of the Knowledge Management Community in Post Office Consulting will now go on to look at who has been codifying Post Office Consulting's story about its 'journey to become a knowledge organisation.'

9.3.3 *'The journey to become a knowledge organisation'*

“If I'm out socially and somebody asks me what I do, I say I'm a postman, because I just can't be arsed to explain to them what I do.” (Senior Manager, Knowledge Management Practitioner Group)

A section entitled Post Office Consulting's 'journey to become a knowledge organisation' appeared in Chapter 3. The phrase 'journey to become a knowledge organisation' is used to convey a sense that this is an aspiration of how the organisation would like to see itself, and that certain principles and practices have been established in order to enact this vision. However, this section maintains that the KM key thinkers and shapers who have codified this story about Post Office Consulting's approach to KM, do not represent the organisation, although their influence

²⁹ Tim Bray interview 12.4.99 p.9 of interview transcript

³⁰ Tim Bray interview 12.4.99 p.11 of interview transcript

has resulted in the formalisation of certain structures around KM – for example, the creation of a Knowledge Director, the formation of a KM Practitioner Group, a Knowledge Programme of KM tools and initiatives designed to make Post Office Consulting work better as a ‘knowledge organisation.’ It is suggested that there is a degree of rhetoric in the way these people talk about KM, and that some rhetorical devices – for example, story telling – are forms of knowledge codification. In this case the emphasis moves away from the story telling to an external audience, which is how the story about Post Office Consulting appeared in Chapter 3, to suggest that the knowledge codification is also occurring for an internal audience. However, because the knowledge is codified within this core informal grouping, it does not necessarily mean that it is codified within the wider organisation.

Section 9.2.3 referred to an article written by Malcolm Hart giving a diagram showing Knowledge Transfers from Singapore to WAND, creating the impression that the transfer of knowledge had successfully occurred from Singapore Post to the Post Office’s new international mail centre at Heathrow. It was later revealed by Bob Field that the diagram was developed more as a heuristic to help him think through the potential for knowledge transfer, than an indication that it had actually occurred.³¹ In fact the diagram was actually codified in order to give a story line to the BBC programmes recorded as part of the Post Office Consulting/ Open University collaboration. However, the story which was codified was clearly ahead of practice. It transpired that the diagram is time related, so that Railnet is in the past, IMP is parallel and WAND is in the future.³² However this is not clear from the way the diagram is codified. For example Chris Arthur,³³ who had heard Malcolm Hart and Bob Field on national television and radio talking about Knowledge Management, got the impression that knowledge management practice within Post Office Consulting was much further down the line.

³¹ Bob Field interview 5.11.99 p.1 of interview transcript

³² Bob Field interview 5.11.99 p.1 of interview transcript

³³ Chris Arthur interview 29.9.00 count 1/B 225

Similarly, Andrea Campbell, who recently joined the KM Practitioner Group, describes how she had been interested in joining what she perceived, as an outsider to the organisation, to be a leading-edge Knowledge Management consultancy group. The following quote shows what she had been led to understand about the state of KM in Post Office Consulting;

“the impression was created that we were first up on this - it was a real revelation, it was not as ground-breaking as first appeared ... what I thought was quite innovative stuff around tools, now I’ve built up my knowledge, doesn’t seem quite so innovative.”³⁴

Tim Bray spoke about the early stages of the Knowledge Programme;

“... we spent the first year before the programme trying to talk to people about knowledge by translating models and theories, and dumbing them down effectively to the extent that they didn’t mean anything at all.”³⁵

The approach taken by Tim Bray and Paul Butcher may have alienated some people. For example, Patricia Dalrymple was quite critical about the way ‘they’ approached KM initially; “they used to spout off about tacit to explicit, explicit to tacit and knowledge conversion for well over a year ... and were poor about communicating the reality of it.”³⁶ “On the side of the tacit stuff, don’t even mention the word tacit, it doesn’t mean anything to anybody that hasn’t read anything about Knowledge Management.”³⁷ As Patricia suggests;

“3 years ago we were talking about Knowledge Management, and we spouted off, you know, about Nonaka, and you know it was great and that meant sweet Fanny Adams to anyone in the organisation, because it didn’t really mean anything to us ... some of the key people, people like Tim and Paul,

³⁴ Andrea Campbell interview 28.3.00 count 430

³⁵ Tim Bray interview 11.12.98 p.11 of interview transcript

³⁶ Meeting with Patricia Dalrymple 24.6.99 p.18 of fieldwork journal

³⁷ Patricia Dalrymple interview 10.6.99 p.14 of interview transcript

have got it up here, but they haven't got the ability really, I think, to communicate it and make it real for people, and I think we need far more people for whom it is real to be telling the story.”³⁸

However, Paul Butcher's explanation was that “two years ago I was banging my head against a brick wall ... and dragging the organisation forward on knowledge.” He admits that they felt it necessary to over-inflate the ‘story’ in order to get people to feel positive about the strategy.³⁹

Paul says now that knowledge management “does not pay back over short periods” – pay back takes 18 months to 2 years.⁴⁰ This view appears to contradict what Paul is attributed to have said in Chapter 3, that early Knowledge Interviews have already proved a pay back.

The formulation of the Knowledge Programme actually occurred in order to bring together a rather disparate set of tools and initiatives which had already been started.⁴¹ In a sense it was a post-rationalisation of what was already happening around the KM tools in Post Office Consulting. This is rather different from the view of the Knowledge Programme presented in Chapter 3 being formed first as the organising framework for its different elements.

So in a sense the codification of the Knowledge Programme occurred in order to make sense of what was happening. The Knowledge Programme was codified by Paul Butcher and Tim Bray. However, it is clear that even they had difficulty in remembering the latest way in which the KM Programme has been organised, as shown in this quote from Tim:

“... we end up with our three strands of intellect ... I'll get stumped now - Intellectual capital, linking people to people and something else ... people to information perhaps.”⁴²

³⁸ Patricia Dalrymple interview 10.6.99 p.12 of interview transcript

³⁹ Paul Butcher interview 3.8.00 count 1/A 225. Note that Paul explicitly uses the term ‘story.’ He says that at that time they were ‘telling a story’ about PO Consulting and the knowledge theme.

⁴⁰ Paul Butcher interview 3.8.00 count 1/A 340

⁴¹ Tim Bray interview 11.12.98 p.2 of interview transcript

⁴² Tim Bray interview 12.4.99 p.19 of interview transcript

The use of ‘we’ when talking about the approach to KM in Post Office Consulting is interesting. For example, Bob Field says when talking about their approach “we have a thing around people, processes and technology.”⁴³ ‘We’ presumably refers to the informal grouping responsible for codifying their knowledge into the KM approach, rather than the organisation as a whole, although clearly these people talk about their approach as the organisation’s approach.

Barry Hewitt is a Senior Consultant in the KM Practitioner Group, who has read widely around the subject of KM, and is highly knowledgeable about what people are saying about KM. Although he is clearly both a KM enthusiast and practitioner, he does not appear to be part of what is being described here as the community of key thinkers and shapers, and challenges this notion of a Post Office Consulting-wide approach:

“Well, I think there are some who claim that there is *the* Post Office Consulting view about knowledge and about Knowledge Management, and I don’t know what that means, to be honest, because I have never been engaged in a debate about that in a meaningful forum.”⁴⁴

Barry, who is also on the Post Office Consulting Knowledge Programme Board, questions the extent to which this approach has been codified;

“... there was an understanding by two or three people about what the Knowledge Programme was, but none of us shared that ... I think that what the Knowledge Programme was last year was unclear ... this year in a way we have gone to the other polarity, where we have got this PRINCE-based, hugely detailed, documented set of business cases which we went through, but again, the Knowledge Programme Board never had a formative discussion about what a Knowledge Programme should look like ... I think there had been discussions outside the Programme Board, but not on the Programme Board.”⁴⁵

⁴³ Bob Field interview 11.12.98 p.2 of interview transcript

⁴⁴ Barry Hewitt interview 10.6.99 p.7 of interview transcript

⁴⁵ Barry Hewitt interview 10.6.99 p.10 of interview transcript

In summary this section argues that an approach to KM in Post Office Consulting was established, but that the codification of this approach represents the knowledge of a core community of ‘key thinkers and shapers’ who have influence in the organisation. The members of this grouping have a common understanding of KM which they have codified as an approach for the organisation, but it is important to stress that they are not *the* organisation. The discussion was presented as an informal level at which the codification of knowledge has seen to be occurring within the organisation.

9.3.4 *Codification of the Knowledge Process model*

As discussed in Chapter 3, the Knowledge Core Process model – also known as the Knowledge Cycle - is the heuristic developed to define and guide the Knowledge Management process. The Knowledge Core Process Model is shown in Figure 3.1. It is discussed here as a codification device which can be seen to link people at an informal level who have an interest in Knowledge Management.

As a part of the ‘core community’ which codified the Knowledge Cycle, Paul Butcher has mixed feelings about what it achieved. The Knowledge Cycle was developed by Tim, Paul and Steven Marks.⁴⁶ It was drawn as a cycle or spiral in order to convey a dynamic and never-ending sense of how knowledge flows and develops,⁴⁷ but Paul feels that the four-stage model imposes a sense of linearity on the process, where people believe that knowledge management involves doing one stage in the cycle then moving on to the next.⁴⁸ Indeed Tim Bray, who was involved in the development of the Knowledge Cycle model himself, talks about developing tools and techniques “to support the four steps in the knowledge process.”⁴⁹ The use of the term ‘steps’ conveys the notion of a sequential process.

⁴⁶ Tim Bray interview 12.4.99 p.18 of interview transcript

⁴⁷ Tim Bray claims they based it on Kolb’s learning cycle.

⁴⁸ Paul Butcher interview 3.8.00 count 1/A 410 - 420

⁴⁹ Tim Bray interview 11.12.98 p.1 of interview transcript

This is also characteristic of how Philip Connelly talks about the knowledge cycle;

“You start with the capture of knowledge, and that could be through the Knowledge Interview, deploy it and share it in some way, and then to actually use it, and to review it.”⁵⁰

He later says;

“...the most important part of the process, is you need to capture it first before you can share or apply or review.”⁵¹

This approach was observed in the AKAP project, where the use of language from the Knowledge Process Model was endemic in the discourse over the terms ‘capture’ and ‘deploy’: Capture and deployment were adopted not only as the dominant language in AKAP, but also became two sequential stages in the project process. This separation clearly sat comfortably with the PRINCE project management approach used in AKAP, which recommends the division of the project according to sequential stages.

The potentially constraining effect created by words in the Knowledge Process Model questions whether codified knowledge can represent a complex and dynamic process, where the intention is for the codification to shape the imitation of the process (as opposed to the codification occurring in order to represent a process which is naturally happening).

Paul Butcher recognises this danger. He believes he has anecdotal evidence to suggest that people find an “easy” first step is to capture knowledge: The using and reviewing parts are more difficult and, for this reason, people do not do it.⁵² As an organisation, Paul feels that they have

⁵⁰ Philip Connelly interview 22.3.99 p.8 of interview transcript

⁵¹ Philip Connelly interview 22.3.99 p.16 of interview transcript

⁵² Paul Butcher interview 3.8.00 count 1/A 445

not got to the bottom of this problem yet. To this end Paul recognises a possible limitation of the word ‘capture’, which was easy for people to get a handle on, whereas what they were trying to get at was something more complex conveyed better by a sense of “discovering” knowledge. However, they chose to go for a word that people would more readily understand.⁵³ Paul’s comments highlight the difficulty of describing these complex processes for fear that the words may constrain their conceptual value. It is already interesting to observe that constraining the process with the words ‘capture,’ ‘deploy’ and ‘use’ is itself redolent of a view that knowledge is something which can be separated from the knower or ‘discoverer’ and passed on elsewhere to use.

Nevertheless, a number of informants in the research said they identified with this model. A good example is Simon Mann who uses the cycle’s elements of “capture, deploy, review and use” (his order) as his definition of the Knowledge Management process.⁵⁴ It was interesting to see Simon struggling to remember the order of the elements in the model. This was also observed with Andrea Campbell.⁵⁵ They identify with the overall concept, even though they have difficulty precisely remembering its constituent elements.

While Paul and Tim may not have intended the words to be so rigid and the steps seen as sequential, that is nevertheless how some have interpreted the cycle. In spite of this Paul feels that the Knowledge Cycle has been useful;

“The trouble is that everyone knows it, and the reason I haven’t changed it is because people are familiar with capture, deploy, use, review, and so you’ve got a common language there.”⁵⁶

This section has shown how a Knowledge Process Model has been codified as part of Post Office Consulting’s approach to KM, which serves to link people informally through their

⁵³ Paul Butcher interview 3.8.00 count 1/A 485

⁵⁴ Simon Mann interview 16.5.00 count 2/A 245

⁵⁵ Andrea Campbell interview 28.3.00 count 1/A 550 - 570

⁵⁶ Paul Butcher interview 3.8.00 count 1/A 427

identification with the model. However, the discussion has also shown how the words used also have a possibly constraining effect upon the concepts which they are meant to convey. The discussion has also shown how an informal group can codify their knowledge with the use of such heuristics, but it is clear that people interpret such heuristics in different ways. This discussion has resonance with the way the Knowledge Interview technique was codified among a core group in the previous case presented in this chapter.

9.4 Concluding section

This chapter has examined the codification of knowledge occurring within informal groups or 'communities.' It has shown that informal groupings are an important level in the analysis of knowledge codification in a knowledge management context. By focusing on a Knowledge Interviews community and a Knowledge Management community in PO Consulting, the chapter has showed how knowledge is codified within the communities. Within these wider communities, the chapter focused on core groups of practitioners who are codifying their knowledge in order to establish Knowledge Management tools, practices and approaches within the organisation. Both cases showed that the codification of knowledge underpinning the establishment of KM tools and a KM approach occurred within core groups. The extent to which their knowledge can be said to be codified among the wider group is questioned. These findings suggest that the process of codifying knowledge works well within communities of like-minded practitioner who identify with each other's interest and share an understanding of the nature of their practice. This chapter suggest that knowledge codified within these core groupings does not necessarily transfer into the wider organisation in the way that they would like.

The final chapter will now go on to synthesise the findings about knowledge codification in a KM context, which have been presented in the preceding analytical chapters.

CHAPTER 10: KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT AND THE CODIFICATION OF KNOWLEDGE:

A SYNTHESIS

10.1 Introduction

This introduction first reviews the research aims and questions guiding the research process. It presents a short discussion of the research focus and the process of analysis, before going into a more lengthy discussion and evaluation of the conceptual approaches guiding the thesis. In Section 2, the chapter presents the key findings and additions to knowledge about knowledge codification in a Knowledge Management context which have emerged from the research. The chapter then draws upon these findings to propose that a new conceptual approach is needed for the role of codification in Knowledge Management, which indicates the importance of generating the closest possible coalescence between the codification and *decodification* processes. This proposal is made in section 3, 'Towards a new conceptual approach to knowledge codification and decodification in a Knowledge Management context.' The chapter then goes on in Section 4 to reflect upon the use of participant observation as a research methodology. In Section 5 the chapter concludes by making recommendations for further research.

Before proceeding with the introduction to the chapter, it is necessary to equip the reader with some definitions of key terminology used in the discussion, particularly the terms 'Knowledge Management' and 'knowledge transfer.' Throughout the chapter the term 'Knowledge Management' (note the capital letters) denotes the context in which the research was conducted: Post Office Consulting's interest in KM emerged in the great tidal wave of the KM phenomenon in the mid-to-late 1990's (discussed in Chapters 1 and 2), and the initiatives researched for this thesis were the organisation's response to this widespread clamour for KM. The thesis itself now adopts the term Knowledge Management (capital letters) to be a general term for the field,

and as a recognition of what organisations are attempting to achieve in this context, while not accepting that knowledge can be managed *per se*.

In the Argentina Knowledge Capture Project, the intention at least was to effect some kind of knowledge ‘transfer’ between people in the organisation. Finding out whether or not knowledge transfer was actually achieved was beyond the scope both of the AKAP project and of this research. However, the assumption underlying Post Office Consulting’s KM activity was that the process should result in the transfer of knowledge between people. It is important to note, therefore, that when this chapter uses the term knowledge ‘transfer’, this is not because the thesis has looked at the issue of knowledge transfer, nor is it implying that the concept of knowledge transfer is unproblematic. The chapter adopts the term knowledge transfer to denote what Post Office Consulting’s KM activity was attempting to bring about – that the knowledge of people gained in one context within the organisation may be usefully transferred to people in another context. The chapter does not wish to imply that transfer, unlike ‘share’, involves giving up or surrendering knowledge to someone else: The term transfer is simply adopted because it most closely encompasses what Post Office Consulting were attempting to do about Knowledge Management.

10.1.1 Research aims and questions

Why was knowledge codification in the context of Knowledge Management an important focus for research?

In Chapters 1 and 2 it was shown how knowledge codification is not well understood in the Knowledge Management literature and is more complex than is typically characterised.

Codification in the KM literature (for example, Ruggles, 1997; Davenport and Prusak, 1998; and Zack, 1999) is seen as the vehicle for effecting the transfer of knowledge, and managers are seen as the people who should engage in that process on behalf of the organisation. However,

this literature does not address the process, focusing on the management of information once it has been codified.

Knowledge codification is clearly important to how we communicate our knowledge. It needs to be viewed as a process (Saviotti, 1998) and understood in its social context. In some literature, codification is discussed as unproblematic in its wider social and organisational context (e.g. Zander and Kogut, 1995; Cohendet and Steinmuller, 2000; Cowan et al., 2000). In Chapter 1 it was suggested that codes have a social function in defining boundaries, and that therefore knowledge codification might be significant within different groupings in the organisation, particularly ‘communities of practice.’

The research therefore set out to:

- explore and understand better the concept of knowledge codification in the context of Knowledge Management in the organisation
- examine processes of knowledge codification as they are actually occurring in an organisation grappling with ideas about Knowledge Management
- examine who is involved in processes of knowledge codification, what characterises their relationships, and what other factors are involved in an organisational context

10.1.2 Research focus and analysis process

While codification is seen as an important feature in Knowledge Management literature, there have apparently been no empirical studies examining the role of knowledge codification in a Knowledge Management context. This thesis therefore addresses that gap.

It was important to become ‘grounded’ in what is actually happening in an organisation which is trying to develop a Knowledge Management approach. The use of Post Office Consulting as a case-study organisation enabled detailed research to be conducted using the methodology of participant observation into processes of knowledge codification in a KM project. For a detailed discussion of reflections on the research methodology, see Section 4 of this chapter.

It should be emphasised that the focus of this thesis is knowledge codification in a Knowledge Management context. The thesis did not examine the codification of knowledge which occurs ‘organically’ (as it was called in chapter 5), instead focusing on what the thesis calls ‘managed’ codification – that is, codification of knowledge which occurs in a Knowledge Management context. ‘Organic’ processes of knowledge codification might be thought of as occurring in the normal daily interaction between people. When looking at the individual level of knowledge codification, it must be remembered that this is discussed in its KM context. Thus in the analytical chapters, the individual level of ‘managed’ codification focuses predominantly on Knowledge Interviews: These take place in dyadic relationships between individuals, one of which is the subject of the codification process, while the other has been established as an intermediary to broker the process on behalf of the organisation. These individual cases of ‘managed’ codification are not cases of individuals codifying their knowledge on their own ‘organically.’ Although it would have been interesting to contrast ‘managed’ with ‘organic’ codification if the opportunity had presented itself in the research, this remains an interesting area of study for the future.

As mentioned in the previous section, the thesis set out with the assumption that codification of knowledge is a social process: The review of literature presented in Chapters 1 and 2 indicated that the social context and relations within which knowledge is codified are significant.

Therefore the research set out to pay particular attention to who is involved in the process and how are they related. The analysis process was focused around the different social groupings

observed in the fieldwork, enabling the research to reinforce the assumption that there are important social and organisational dimensions to the process.

Therefore an important conceptual framework for the thesis was the use of social ‘levels’ guiding the analysis – that is, knowledge codification at an individual, group, organisational and informal group level. When conceptualising knowledge and codification, there is a sense in which there is only an individual level: After all, we are the individuals who do the knowing, not groups or organisations. However, given the argument made in Chapters 1 and 2 that codification is a social process, the social context and the relations within which knowledge is codified *must* be important. The other levels – i.e. formal group, organisation, informal group – are not saying that groups or organisations have knowledge, but rather these were significant social contexts in which codification occurs. In the Knowledge Management context, individuals were not codifying their knowledge on their own in a vacuum, there were clear social and organisational dimensions to what they were doing.

10.1.3 Conceptual approaches guiding the thesis

Chapter 1 defined knowledge as what people have, and what passes between people is information. Thus people codify their knowledge using language and other means, in order to communicate their knowledge to other people, or perhaps just to capture it for themselves. Codified knowledge is also information: We can say it is knowledge from the perspective of the person(s) whose knowledge is codified, and information to someone else. When talking about the ‘transfer’ of knowledge, it is often implied that the process of someone benefiting from someone else’s knowledge involves a flow of information between them.

Blackler’s (1995) typology of the location of knowledge in organisations presented in Chapter 2 – i.e. that knowledge can be embrained, embodied, encultured, embedded and encoded – has been used as a heuristic for understanding the forms in which knowledge can be located,

captured and transferred. This typology was particularly helpful in focusing the thesis, as it provided the conceptual basis for understanding how the popular KM concepts such as ‘capture’ and ‘transfer’ relate to the thesis focus on knowledge codification. Blackler reminds us that encoded – or codified – knowledge is but one representation of knowledge in the organisation, but one that in the West we apparently privilege over knowledge represented in other forms.

Among the key findings later in this chapter, it is shown how in the case of Post Office Consulting, the enactment of KM clearly privileged knowledge which could be verbalised and codified into text in order to effect knowledge transfer. Although Blackler (1995, p.1033) suggests that it is “a mistake to assume that embodied, embedded, embrained, encultured and encoded knowledge can sensibly be conceived as separate from one another,” the focus on codification was absolutely fundamental to Post Office Consulting’s approach to KM, to the exclusion of all other possible forms and representations of knowledge.

The Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) model of what they call a knowledge ‘creation’ process – which is effectively a model of how people learn in an organisational context (particularly in the group environment where people interact with others with similar knowledge) – has served as a useful heuristic. Nonaka and Takeuchi’s 2x2 matrix (see Figure 2.1, Chapter 2) has been helpful in conceptualising where knowledge codification fits into the way people interact with other people’s knowledge. In Nonaka and Takeuchi’s terms, codification is a major process by which people’s tacit knowledge becomes explicit. Whether or not tacit knowledge can be made explicit (as questioned, for example, by Cook and Brown, 1999) is a different question.

Codification is nevertheless the primary vehicle for people to make their knowledge explicit. Indeed in the AKAP experience it was the only way in which people’s knowledge was solicited.

Nonaka and Takeuchi have also been helpful in understanding the context of people’s actions when carrying out ‘KM’ in Post Office Consulting. As AKAP was launched under the KM banner, the tacit-explicit distinction which had been bandied heavily within Post Office

Consulting was foremost in people's minds, especially the Project Manager and some of the active Project Board members. Therefore the need to make explicit the so-called 'tacit knowledge' of consultants was a key aim of the project, and not coincidentally, the Knowledge Interview had already been developed as a tool to do this very thing. As AKAP progressed, what the process was effectively seeking to do was to combine the codified knowledge from each of the consultants i.e. the explicit-to-explicit or 'combination' part of Nonaka and Takeuchi's matrix. However, as was shown in the analytical chapters, what the AKAP team members did not appear to foresee was that their involvement would alter the knowledge codification process. This finding is discussed in more depth later in this chapter. Using Nonaka and Takeuchi to interpret the finding, it is not possible for other people to combine codified or explicit knowledge without contributing their own tacit-to-explicit-to-tacit knowledge processes. So while Nonaka and Takeuchi may have a reasonable model for knowledge creation, it is not so helpful for modelling the knowledge transfer process.

Nevertheless, Nonaka and Takeuchi's knowledge conversion processes do provide a useful point of reference for understanding knowledge processes in an organisational context. While the tacit-to-explicit and the explicit-to-explicit processes – or at least the attempt to engage in these processes – were present in the AKAP approach, the two of Nonaka and Takeuchi's processes which lead to the acquisition of tacit knowledge were clearly not attempted or seriously discussed in the project approach. As this chapter progresses, the importance of opening up the discourse on decodification of knowledge will become apparent. Nonaka and Takeuchi do not talk about the decodification presumably involved in their category of knowledge 'internalisation', indeed it would be interesting to see how they observed this happening empirically. AKAP did not confront the question of who would be using this information which was being codified, and how other people might decodify it. Using Nonaka and Takeuchi therefore, it is possible to see a gap in AKAP addressing the explicit-to-tacit part of their matrix, remembering of course that we are applying this model to AKAP's intention to transfer knowledge rather than the concept of knowledge creation. As for tacit-to-tacit

knowledge – or ‘socialisation’ – AKAP did not even get close to effecting the sort of direct relationships between people which would allow this type of knowledge exchange to occur. However, this thesis is interested in the role of codification, which of course would not play a part in tacit-to-tacit knowledge conversion. The gap in Nonaka and Takeuchi’s model which this chapter therefore recommends for further research is how knowledge is decodified, represented by the explicit-to-tacit segment of their matrix.

The communities of practice literature (advanced most significantly by Brown, Collins & Duguid, 1989; Brown & Duguid, 1991, 1998; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998, 2000; Wenger & Snyder, 2000) has been important in helping to shape the thesis, particularly in terms of identifying an informal level to the organisation. However, the communities of practice literature is curiously silent on how members of these ‘shared histories of learning’ (Wenger, 1998) communicate their knowledge. Wenger’s concept of reification – apparently a reference to how shared meanings and understandings are established – does not convey the use of codes by which participants in the community are able to communicate on a common platform. In Chapter 2 it was suggested that the concept of knowledge codification must be relevant to such communities. This chapter offers significant insight to the communities of practice literature, as the key findings identify both the importance of ‘communities of practice’ knowledge and the emergence of codes in the knowledge codification process which are clearly shared by people who share knowledge of work in practice. This thesis is now able to offer something back to the communities of practice literature. It is able to suggest that codification is the process by which such shared meanings and understandings are communicated, and throws light on the processes by which this occurs.

The chapter will now go on to discuss the key findings about knowledge codification in a Knowledge Management context which have arisen from the analysis.

10.2 Key findings about knowledge codification in a knowledge management context

Findings are divided into three areas:

- findings relating to the definition of knowledge codification in a Knowledge Management context
- findings relating to the nature of the Knowledge Management approach in the case-study organisation
- findings relating to the role of actors/ participants in the knowledge codification process

10.2.1 Findings relating to the definition of knowledge codification

As a result of the findings about knowledge codification in a KM context, the chapter is able to reinforce and enhance the working definition of ‘knowledge codification’ used to guide the thesis. The thesis started with a working definition provided by Cowan and Foray (1997, p.596) as “the process of conversion of knowledge into messages which can then be processed as information.” However, it was found in the KM context that this was only part of what is happening. The thesis has found that there are 2 aspects to the codification of knowledge:

1. Process of defining codes

Codes were seen to emerge in the KM process, in order to help participants make sense of what they were doing. Chandler (2002) defines the term codification as the process whereby codes and conventions associated with them are established. Cowan et al (2000) also talk about how ‘codebooks’ emerge in the early stages of the codification process. Over time these become specialised languages which are only intelligible to individuals and groups able to interpret the code. In the AKAP case, codes emerged

which enabled participants to make sense of the KM process which they were enacting.

This finding has a clear implication for the transferability of knowledge out of its originating context: The codes used to codify knowledge may have limited meaning outside the codifying group.

2. Process of codifying previously uncoded knowledge

There are two different aspects of codification here:

- a) Codification of previously 'tacit' knowledge – i.e. the process underpinning Nonaka and Takeuchi's (1995) distinction of a movement between 'tacit' and 'explicit' forms of knowledge – for example, use of language to articulate, describe, explain etc. Although Chapter 2 suggested that Polanyi's concept of tacit knowing effectively defies codification, this thesis simply takes codification as a process by which knowledge is made explicit, whether this be 'tacit' knowledge or not. This can be seen as a primary level of codification – not necessarily for the first time, but primary in the sense that the codification emerges from the person who has the knowledge.
- b) Codification of information i.e. knowledge which has already been codified into information. This is the treatment of codification made, among others, by Sorensen and Lundh-Snis (2001), who view codification as a process of classification, or it could be the coding of research data (Baumard, 1999). This can be seen as a secondary level of codifying knowledge which has already been codified as information.

The thesis has contributed the concepts of primary and secondary codification of knowledge, and found that codification on both levels was occurring within the KM context in Post Office Consulting. The AKAP project was particularly predicated on the need first to codify the primary knowledge of Argentina consultants, and then on the use of

intermediaries to further codify this knowledge at a secondary level in to a range of written products. However, when intermediaries are involved, it becomes very difficult to disentangle the original primary codification from the knowledge which an intermediary brings to the process. As is discussed later in the chapter, the knowledge of the intermediary becomes codified in the process, and it therefore becomes difficult to see a distinction between the primary and the secondary knowledge codification processes.

10.2.2 Findings relating to the nature of knowledge management in Post Office

Consulting

1. A knowledge-as-information view predominated in Post Office Consulting's Knowledge Management approach

This empirical research into this organisation's Knowledge Management activity found that a knowledge-as-information view dominated the process. While Post Office Consulting claimed that it was managing 'knowledge', this necessarily involved the codification of knowledge into information. Underneath the rhetoric of KM was essentially the codification and capture of information. This may be symptomatic of a perceived need to codify knowledge into information in order for it to become an object of management. This is what Chapter 2 termed the 'objectification' of knowledge, and is one side of a dichotomous treatment of knowledge noted by Roos and Von Krogh (1996), Sveiby (1996), Quintas et al (1997), Alvesson and Kärreman (2001) and Swan and Scarborough (2001), the other side treating knowledge, or rather 'knowing,' as a social process. According to these commentators, KM practice has been dominated by the knowledge-as-information approach, and the results of this research certainly bear out their claims.

2. *The Knowledge Management approach assumed that knowledge needs to be transferred and the vehicle was codification into text*

In Post Office Consulting, the KM approach was predicated on the assumption that codified knowledge needs to be transferred, or at least that management needs to effect the movement of knowledge, and the means of doing this was codification of knowledge into a written form. As suggested above, this could be interpreted as an underlying ‘cognitivist’ treatment of knowledge discussed by Swan et al (1999) and von Krogh (1998), which views knowledge as objectifiable, or a predominant ‘epistemology of possession’ suggested by Cook and Brown (1999). According to Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) and Blackler (1995), there is a predisposition for Western managers to give pre-eminence to the codification of knowledge. It is clear that in the case-studies of KM researched for this thesis, the participants privileged the codification of knowledge into information (predominantly text) as a way of effecting its transfer. The Post Office Consulting Knowledge Management cycle of ‘capture, deploy, use, review’ – a model for conceptualising the KM process – was translated literally into a KM project structured in sequential stages to first capture knowledge as information, then transfer it to other people in the organisation.

3. *Management was broadly conceived as intervention to broker the transfer of knowledge through codification*

In Post Office Consulting, management was broadly assumed to involve intervention to broker the transfer of knowledge through codification. Alvesson and Kärreman (2001) observe that people who write about KM will often see the need to define knowledge, but not the management part of it which is treated as ‘self-evident and unproblematic or, more commonly, black-boxed and unexplicated.’ This is also true of AKAP: While the group did discuss what type of knowledge they were capturing, they did not explicitly address the issue of what management involves. There was an understanding that as project members mobilised to perform this task, their role was to effect the transfer of knowledge, and that knowledge codification was the vehicle for achieving this. While the project focused

predominantly upon the creation of information sources, it would be going too far to say that their activity could be defined as 'information management.' It is the 'management' part which was poorly defined in the Post Office Consulting case, not the knowledge-as-information view which predominated the process.

4. *Knowledge management became dominated by capturing knowledge, but with little sense of the end-use context or an end-user*

The AKAP project showed that despite the best intentions of the Project Manager, the project approach became dominated by the capture part, while the process lost sight of who it was being done for. A problem with capturing knowledge is that it assumes some one will come along later to make use of it. There is usually an assumption of use after knowledge has been codified, yet the entire AKAP process seemed to lose sight of an end-user. 'Who is the knowledge being codified for' was not a question seriously confronted by the participants – they focused first and foremost on making sense of the process themselves and developing their own knowledge of what happened in Argentina. There was an unknown party missing from the process in terms of who might be making use of this information. This finding can be interpreted as a lack of understanding or even consideration of how this codified knowledge might be decodified.

5. *Knowledge Management was seriously hampered by organisational politics within the Post Office*

AKAP was caught up in political tension between two rival organisations within the Post Office Group – Post Office Consulting and BPCS.¹ There was also politics within the group of Argentina consultants, which came out strongly in the cases of individual Knowledge Interviews: The organisational political context affected what people were prepared to say, and whether they would allow their knowledge to be made available to

¹ Chapter 3 explained that the Post Office Group is so large, that there are separate and competing organisations within it. The two organisations under discussion here – Post Office Consulting and British Postal Consultancy Services – are taken to be separate organisations.

other people. This reminds us that the organisational political dimension to Knowledge Management was not just about inter-organisational conflict, as it emerged within Chapter 8.² Given this politics within the group of Argentina consultants, it is little wonder that AKAP itself became heavily affected by organisational politics, which itself seriously affected the efforts at Knowledge Management. It is unwise to speculate that if the Argentina Consultancy Project had been less politically troublesome, this would have made Knowledge Management any easier, and the project team better able to deliver on its original goals. In reality the project team themselves embraced the organisational political dimension and the project manager used it as a lever to cut back on an over-ambitious project plan. The AKAP project seemed to embrace the political dimension to the process rather than work around it. Inevitably where knowledge in organisations is involved, there will be a political dimension. In reality Knowledge Management needs to recognise the difficulty which political tensions can bring to the process and seek to work round them.

6. *Organisational political conflict arose, but only over the codified product not the codification process*

Baumard's (1999) assertion that "rather than managing knowledge, organizations manage its codifications" was supported in part by the research: While Post Office Consulting did indeed seek to codify knowledge in order to manage it, the organisation sought to manage knowledge – or information – only once it was codified. The organisation did not seek to manage the codification process itself. In Chapter 8 it was shown that inter-organisational conflict within AKAP occurred only once a product had arisen from the process. This was the point at which AKAP turned to the question of 'deploying' the knowledge it had captured. Up to that point, inter-organisational politics had been apparent to the extent that it affected the personal relationships between participants in the process. As discussed

² The wider Argentinean political context had an effect upon the consultant's work and the overall consultancy project while they were in Argentina, but this did not affect what they were willing to say for the AKAP project after they had returned. It was the internal organisational political dimension which significantly affected the codification process. So while some political context to the Argentinean Consultancy Project was given in Chapter 5, there was no need to include it in the analysis.

above, it affected what knowledge people were prepared to codify and were willing to have captured. Once there was a product to manage, organisational conflict in the process became apparent in the wrangling over who was allowed to deploy what. By this point AKAP had already done a large part of its knowledge capturing, so inter-organisational conflict did not affect the codification process itself, but what AKAP was able to say it had codified. The competing organisation in question (BPCS) did not get involved in the process, but did become involved when there was something tangible – a codified product – which could become an object of ownership or control.

10.2.3 Findings relating to participants and intermediaries in the knowledge codification process

The Post Office Consulting model of Knowledge Management was based upon intervening to broker the movement of knowledge, and to employ intermediaries to manage the process. The following key findings about the use of intermediaries emerged:

1. Familiarity with the subject matter and knowledge of the codes used significantly affected the ability of intermediaries to engage in the knowledge codification process

The AKAP project team was formed mostly from ‘outsiders’ who first had to familiarise themselves with knowledge of the Argentina consultancy project before the knowledge capture process made much sense to them. Within all of the groups analysed in the research – both formal and informal – codes emerged which enabled participants to share a sense of what they were doing. Prior knowledge of existing codes and the knowledge required to interpret the code enabled greater productivity among some intermediaries in the knowledge codification process. In the AKAP Analysis Meetings, for example, members of the group with greater existing knowledge of postal operations were more productive in the codification process. As Cowan and Foray (1997) say, “knowledge is easier to codify and

codified knowledge is easier to diffuse within a community of agents who can read the codes.” Familiarity was also lacking in participants’ knowing who they were codifying the knowledge for. This point is taken up immediately below.

2. *Unexpectedly the knowledge of intermediaries became codified in the process, and the process was hampered over who knowledge was being codified for*

In Chapter 5 Figure 5.2, the cases of knowledge codification analysed in the thesis were examined in terms of who is doing the codifying, whose knowledge is being codified, and who is the knowledge being codified for. These important research questions were followed through in the subsequent analytical chapters. It is now possible to synthesise the main findings which arise significantly from these questions:

- a. Who is doing the codifying?

The AKAP project mobilised a team of participants whose role as intermediaries was to carry out Knowledge Management. It was significant that there were intermediaries engaging in the knowledge codification process, rather than Argentina Consultants doing their own codifying and capturing of knowledge.

- b. Whose knowledge is being codified?

The key finding here is that as well as the subject’s knowledge being codified (in AKAP’s case the Knowledge Interviewee) the knowledge of other intermediaries involved was also codified in the process. This finding questions whether the concept of transferring knowledge via intermediaries is a useful one.

- c. Who is the knowledge being codified for?

In AKAP, much of the knowledge was captured in a vacuum with no sense of an end-use context, or who the knowledge was being codified for. There was simply an underlying assumption that if this knowledge were codified and captured, that the

information created might be useful in the future. This made the codification process difficult. It is difficult to codify knowledge when there is no sense of the end-use context or knowledge of how the information might be decoded.

In the analytical chapters there were cases of knowledge codification where the process was guided by a better sense of an end-use context, and how an end-user might decode the knowledge. These cases showed that the codification process was much easier for the codifiers concerned. The context of interaction in which knowledge is codified is also important. In an interview situation with both codifier and decoder present, the codification process was less problematic than the production of Knowledge Interview case-studies, where the codifier was working alone with little knowledge of the anticipated context of decoding.

3. People who share similar 'community of practice' knowledge are able to codify and decode knowledge more similarly

If people share similar knowledge then they are more likely to be able to decode the knowledge which people with similar knowledge have codified. In the research it was found that familiarity with the subject matter of the Knowledge Interview affected the ability of the Interviewer to engage in the knowledge codification process. Lack of similar knowledge was a barrier to the Interviewer conducting a more effective interview, for example, in terms of technical knowledge (as defined by the AKAP project team) or familiarity with the Argentina Consultancy Project. If the Interviewer shared similar knowledge, or spoke a similar 'language' to the Interviewer (e.g. understood the same technical vocabulary) then this made the interview process easier for the Interviewer to engage in. There is clearly a 'community of practice' issue here – enabling common understanding of terms, and with little need to familiarise themselves with the subject matter. People who share community of practice knowledge are more likely to codify and decode knowledge similarly, and this has clear implications for the transferability of knowledge between such people.

Communities of practice develop codes for the precise purpose of communicating their knowledge. When people share community of practice knowledge, they share not only knowledge of the code, but also the knowledge needed to make sense of the code. This finding is not limited to communities of practice. In the formal group interaction in AKAP, particularly in the Analysis Meetings, the activity was very much about establishing a group sense of what the codes underpinning the process should be. Codification enables knowledge share within groups and communities, at the same time as inhibiting knowledge share to people outside those groups.

There are therefore 2 aspects to this finding:

- Members of communities of practice have similar knowledge, therefore they are able to interpret codes more similarly (e.g. they have the background knowledge to make sense of codes similarly).
- Within communities of practice, members are able to codify and decodify knowledge more similarly – indeed, they develop specialised codes to enable this communication of knowledge to occur.

4. *The involvement of different intermediaries represents different layers of context in the knowledge codification process, and these affect the transferability of knowledge*

When knowledge is codified, it is decontextualised to some extent, and this affects the extent to which knowledge can be transferred through the codified medium. There were several layers of change in context – or decontextualisation of the knowledge codified – in the Post Office Consulting approach. These fall into two types: Changes in the involvement of people, representing a fundamental change of context in which things are known (Augier et al, 2001); and the actual process of codifying the information itself, in terms of the layers of change in context from the consultant acquiring the knowledge working in Argentina,

through to a spoken interview about this knowledge, to the codified text as the final information product.

In terms of people, as was shown in the key findings, it was not possible to use intermediaries to transfer ‘primary’ knowledge from one person to a third party through codification, as the intermediaries’ own knowledge becomes codified in the process. Thus through the use of intermediaries, the context in which the knowledge is codified becomes fundamentally altered.

In terms of the information itself, the approach to KM in Post Office Consulting favoured the codification of knowledge into written text. Verbal codification was only used as a conduit for written codification. In addition to the various layers of intermediaries involved, it is also possible to chart the stripping out of context through the various layers of information created by AKAP – starting with the interviews, through the transcripts and case-studies to the project reports. The interview transcript was a heavily decontextualised account of a conversation between two people, and the case-study was also the codification of the intermediary’s knowledge.

Unless people share similar knowledge and similar codes for expressing their knowledge, the transferability of knowledge out of context is limited. The potential for knowledge transfer may be enhanced by preservation of some elements of context when knowledge is codified, although they were not identified in this research. This might make an interesting topic for future research.

10.3 Towards a new conceptual approach to knowledge codification and decodification in a knowledge management context

10.3.1 Critique of the Post Office Consulting approach

A fundamental critique of the Post Office Consulting approach to Knowledge Management – typified by the Argentina Knowledge Capture Project – is that it took a linear and sequential view of the process, aiming first to ‘capture’ knowledge as codified text, and then to ‘deploy’ this information to potential recipients. It is interesting that it was not the intention of the project members that ‘capture’ would predominate over ‘deployment,’ nor that the principal outcome would be a database of potential information sources constructed with very little consideration for its usability or sense of an end-user in mind. Nevertheless, this is what happened, and a number of factors can be identified which contributed to the predominance of such a linear approach:

- **The influence of the Knowledge Cycle**

The entire Knowledge Management programme was constructed around Post Office Consulting’s ‘Knowledge Cycle’³ making the language of ‘capture-deploy-use-review’ central to the development and positioning of its KM tools. Thus the Knowledge Interview technique was developed as a tool for capturing knowledge, and was selected by AKAP for this purpose, while the Electronic Filing Cabinet format was developed as a tool for ‘deploying’ knowledge to potential end-users. The sequential nature of the Knowledge Management approach was reinforced by the language used and the tools developed to support the process. By nature, ‘deployment’ cannot come before ‘capture’ in such a cycle.

³ Discussed in Chapters 3 and 9 and illustrated in Figure 3.1

- **The Project Management context**

In AKAP, a project management infrastructure was built around the staged processes of the Knowledge Cycle, first capturing knowledge then moving on to deployment. The PRINCE Project Management methodology used in AKAP fragmented the overarching project objectives into the delivery of individual products, each treated as a separate step within the project plan. The PRINCE infrastructure therefore drove the project in the direction of 'productisation' which seemingly black boxed the processes by which 'key learning from the Argentina experience' would actually be transferred around the organisation.

- **The organisational political context**

While the overall concept and approach to Knowledge Management implies that Post Office Consulting believed this was a process which should be sequentially managed, the organisational political context meant that the AKAP project shifted focus away from who the eventual end-users might be. There was serious political tension over the question of deployment, ownership and access to the knowledge captured by AKAP. Thus it became practically expedient to start the process on the basis of what knowledge could be captured, and politically expedient to cut back many of the knowledge deployment plans, which organisationally were determined to be out of the realm of Post Office Consulting.

- **The influence of intermediaries**

Of fundamental importance to the shape of the KM approach was the use and influence of intermediaries. These intermediaries were not getting people together so that they could share knowledge directly: They were taking on the role of codifier themselves. In the absence of any knowledge about who a third party user might be, these intermediaries were effectively taking on the role of user, by focusing in on what they understood, what they found interesting, and what they, as users, needed to know in order to make sense of what they were being told. The products codified from the process were not just a representation of the knowledge of the Argentina group of consultants, it was also a codification of the

knowledge of the intermediaries who played a key role in steering the process. In terms of a linear effect on the overall KM approach, it was necessary for the intermediaries to understand what knowledge the Argentina consultants have (i.e. capture) before deciding which parts of this knowledge could be relevant to a third party's needs (i.e. deploy).

Underlying it all undoubtedly is a knowledge-as-information view discussed in the previous section. However, the critique is not that a knowledge-as-information view predominated. It is argued that in attempting to manage knowledge, the Post Office Consulting approach only considered the codification side of a possible knowledge transfer process, not how a third party might make sense of and practically make use of the information. In the words of this thesis, the approach did not consider the issue of decodification, that is, how a third party might decodify the information created.

This argument has resonance with the critiques of information theory made by Sveiby, Baumard and Chandler which were reviewed in Chapter 2. Sveiby (1996) argues that much of information systems development has been shaped by Shannon and Weaver's information theory. Shannon and Weaver ' (1949) developed a simple model of information exchange which focuses on the technical functionality of the channel by which information flows between a sender and a receiver. However, they did not address the nature of the information flowing, and how meanings are attributed by the participants to the messages transferred. Both Sveiby (1996) and Chandler (2002) critique information theory for assuming that communication actually occurs, as it only focuses on the message which is transmitted from the sender, and not on the sense made of the information by the receiver. On critiquing the limitation of information theories, Baumard also maintains that;

“Information is but a medium to initiate and formalize knowledge. Most theories of information direct all their attention to the manner in which it is transported, distributed or exchanged, while it

remains necessary to develop a theory that looks more closely at the *sense* of the information and the *messages* that convey information in organizations.” (Baumard, 1999, p.20).

This thesis agrees that there is a need, but does not go so far as to develop such a theory.

However, the research is able to inform some key elements of a new approach which accounts for the importance of both codification *and* decodification in the process. This is an essential element if we are even remotely serious about the potential for knowledge transfer through codification.

Because information theory focuses on the flow of information, the governing paradigm would not seek to establish what is meant by meaning and understanding, simply how the information gets from A to B. The advantage of the Knowledge Management discourse is that it should bring attention to the human processes of knowing and thereby to the question of how meanings and understandings are constructed. However, as shown from the empirical research, Post Office Consulting’s approach very much followed the model of packaging up information to send to a possible receiver. In the process little attention was paid to how a receiver might make sense of and make use of the knowledge codified. The Post Office Consulting approach put an intermediary wedge between the theoretical ideal for knowledge flow, which is direct, face to face and synchronous. In the process, the intermediary took on the role of user (i.e. codifier and decodifier) in order to derive the codified package to send to a possible third party.

It is important, therefore, that people – as individual and unique ‘knowers’ – are at the centre of any approach to Knowledge Management. Focusing predominantly on the creation of information and how that information gets moved around does not get close enough to understanding how the information contributes to someone else’s knowledge and work. There seems little point codifying knowledge for the purpose of transferring it elsewhere in the organisation without someone else able to decodify it. And without knowing who that someone is, it is difficult to know how to codify the knowledge to begin with.

10.3.2 The importance of decodification

The principal conceptual contribution of the thesis, therefore, is to bring attention to the importance of the concept of ‘decodification.’ The importance of a need to focus both on codification *and* decodification has been informed by the empirical research, and was not anticipated as a key theme from the review of literatures made in Chapters 1 and 2. Apart from widespread use of the term ‘decode’ in semiotics (see Chandler, 2002) – meaning how codes are interpreted – the concept of decodification is rarely considered in the literature reviewed in Chapters 1 and 2. The only explicit reference in an organisational and management context is made by the economists Cowan et al (2000) who use the verb ‘decode’ alongside ‘interpret’ and ‘assimilate.’

This thesis argues that decodification is a fundamental part of knowledge transfer through codification. In order for the transfer of codified knowledge to be achieved, the knowledge must be received by another party who attempts to decodify it. Whether seeking to ‘transfer’ knowledge through a KM project, or to ‘share’ knowledge through having a chat with someone, there is no transfer or sharing without decodification. Codification and decodification need to be thought of as inter-dependent processes.

However the argument goes deeper than this: An assumption of decodification is inherent and implicit in the act of codifying knowledge. Usually when codifying knowledge we have a decodifier or a decodification context in mind. If we wish someone else to be able to decodify our knowledge, then we need to codify it in a language and using terms which they are likely to understand. Theoretically the closest possible coalescence between both the codification and decodification of knowledge is likely to occur when the codifier and decodifier are the same person. When the codifier and decodifier are different people, transfer of knowledge between them depends upon the sense which the decodifier makes of the codifier’s knowledge.

Where there is no such sense of who is going to use the information and how they might decodify it – as in the AKAP case – this makes the process of codification much more problematic. If the participants in AKAP had known who they were codifying the knowledge for and what the end-use context of decodification might be, then they might have been able to make a better job of the codification process. However, this could only have been a response to the symptom of a fundamentally flawed approach. Starting from the perspective of decodification – rather than what knowledge can be codified – would bring the focus of attention around to how people incorporate other people's knowledge into their own knowledge and work.

10.3.3 The decodification of codes

As suggested in the discussion above, theoretically the closest possible coalescence between both the codification and decodification of knowledge is likely to occur when the codifier and decodifier are the same person. If different parties are involved, then it is important to maximise the coalescence between codification and decodification in order to effect any kind of knowledge transfer. This can be done by developing and using perhaps specialist codes in order for the parties involved to share their knowledge. Theoretically, the more similar the knowledge of the parties, the more similar is their understanding of the codes used to express that knowledge i.e. their ability to decodify the code similarly.

As seen in the empirical research, groups sharing common tasks and activities develop codes which enable them to share knowledge and express themselves through these codes. However, in order to decodify and incorporate this knowledge meaningfully, it is not just a case of understanding what the code as a term means, it may also require sharing the underlying

knowledge necessary to interpret the code similarly. There are different levels and degrees to which people are able to decodify and act upon knowledge transferred through codification.

One particular context in which knowledge transfer through codification was shown empirically to be effective were the informal groups described as ‘communities of practice.’ Members of such communities were shown to transfer knowledge of action between themselves through codification, but the transfer process was not as homogenous to people outside these core communities. Theoretically there is a case for arguing that one’s ability to decodify knowledge similarly defines one’s membership of such a community of practice.

10.3.4 Implications for an approach to knowledge management

So if we are serious about Knowledge Management, and wish to effect the transfer of knowledge in organisations, what are the implications of an approach which accounts for the importance of both codification and decodification as inter-dependent processes?

The approach should certainly steer clear of Ruggles’ (1997, p.2) advice to treat knowledge codification as “the capture and representation of knowledge so that it can be re-used either by an individual or an organization” and Davenport and Prusak’s (1998) exhortations to codify knowledge to enable its ‘portability’ and ‘distribution.’ As the case of Post Office Consulting has shown, there is limited value in simply capturing knowledge in the hope that someone might find it useful. Capturing knowledge inevitably brings primary attention to what knowledge people have, rather than what knowledge people *need*. It is suggested that a database of information sources – codified in the hope that one day someone might look through and find something useful – does not really play a big part in how people seek information and benefit from other people’s knowledge in practice. There needs to be more research to understand how people actually seek information and use of it in the context of their working lives.

The approach would therefore start from the perspective of the individual knower – how are people able to decodify knowledge and make sense of knowledge communicated to them through codification by other people, and how are they able to incorporate that meaningfully into how they do their work? This is arguably where the real ‘added-value’ lies in a knowledge transfer situation in the organisational context. Understanding why the knowledge is needed and how it might be used should inform how the knowledge is codified. Understanding the role of decodification plays a key part in formulating the approach.

In general, individuals are best placed to determine how they want to receive information. In the AKAP approach, the type of knowledge transfer which the project was attempting to effect would have been best approached by mobilising direct relationships between people. In this way, people who could benefit from the consultant’s knowledge about working in Argentina could ask questions about it directly. Alternatively knowledge could have been presented in some form of master class. There is a big difference between speaking to someone and reading text. In the AKAP approach, the text represented answers to questions someone else wanted to ask. When speaking to someone directly, we can ask each other the questions we need to know. The text at best could be a route to finding someone useful to talk to, but how much text is it worth wading through to find this out? The ability to ask questions directly is an important process in decodifying knowledge.

Intermediaries in any Knowledge Management approach should therefore focus on mobilising relationships between people who could benefit from sharing knowledge – for example, by setting up meetings or master classes – rather than actually intervening in the knowledge codification processes themselves. However, there may also be limits to useful management intervention in this context, as communities of practice by nature are inherently a feature of the informal organisation. Any attempt to manage such communities would therefore be contradictory, but perhaps some moves can be made to encourage such communities to flourish.

The communities of practice themselves were shown to be useful groups for knowledge transfer. Within such communities people share the knowledge to decodify codified knowledge similarly.

As well as understanding how people bring knowledge in through decodification, it is also important to understand people's motivations for giving knowledge 'out' through codification. 'Sharing' knowledge is perhaps a better model for knowledge transfer than simply requiring people to hand over their knowledge for the benefit of the organisation, as in the AKAP case. In this case, organisational politics heavily affected what people were prepared to say. When people share knowledge directly, they may be better able to negotiate their own terms of exchange. People's willingness to share their knowledge must be understood very much in the cultural and political context of the organisation.

10.4 Reflections on the research methodology

Writing a thesis is essentially a process of codifying knowledge: A thesis is the codification of its author's knowledge. Through the process of constructing a thesis, the researcher is developing knowledge about the research process and about the nature of knowledge. Not all of this knowledge is codified. Some of it may always remain tacit. The thesis is a codified representation of what its author wants to communicate about the research, most importantly to the examiners. The assumption inherent in codifying a thesis is that it needs to be decodifiable in a way which meets the examination requirements. This reflection is in keeping with the findings from the empirical research – that the codification of knowledge requires an assumption of decodification to facilitate the process.

In this section it is necessary to reflect upon the process of constructing the thesis. This is important in order to be clear that there are two levels of findings about knowledge codification:

- The codification of knowledge in a Knowledge Management context, which is the subject matter of the thesis and its contribution to wider knowledge about Knowledge Management
- The codification of knowledge by this thesis, which represents the individual learning about the research process engaged in by the researcher.

The knowledge gained about knowledge codification does not just relate to the Knowledge Management context, which is the substantive discussion in this chapter. There is still need to reflect upon the research process. Clearly the writing process was an important part of codifying the thesis, and the constant iteration of the researcher's knowledge through the writing and drafting process is essential in enabling the thesis to emerge in its final codified form. However, the writing process is not the object of this discussion. This section will be concentrating upon the research methodology which enabled the thesis to emerge – that of participant observation – and most importantly, upon the role of the researcher as participant and observer within the process.

Chapter 4 set out the phenomenological approach to the research, using the methodology of participant observation (Jorgensen, 1989), which gives particular emphasis to the role of the researcher in the research process. Figure 4.1 stressed the importance of getting 'inside the box' and becoming a participant in the process of enacting Knowledge Management. Indeed, the research aims could not have been fulfilled without this mode of research. A question is whether it is possible to distinguish two different roles of participant and observer – can these roles be separated, and is it possible to switch between the two? Furthermore, is it necessary for the codifier of the thesis take on an objective and neutral role as an observer of the Knowledge Management process, whilst simultaneously enacting the Knowledge Management process under observation?

Advocates of research conducted in this mode (most notably cited in Chapter 4: Jorgensen, 1989; and Amit, 2000), do not sufficiently cover these points. The methodology literature did not help to prepare the research for the implications of the researcher's own objectivity as a participant in the process. Having conducted the research, it is possible to reflect that it is difficult to view either the role of participation or observation entirely objectively and distinctly from the other. It is also difficult to divorce oneself from the experience as a participant within the box, and to make entirely neutral observations from the outside. One of Jorgensen's (1989) 'minimal conditions' for participant observation is that the research phenomenon can be viewed from the insider's perspective, but he does not give any advice on how to move from the insider perspective to observing the situation as an outsider, nor does he say whether it is possible or indeed necessary. Furthermore, to what extent is it possible for a researcher to come into an organisation as an outsider and gain an insider perspective?

Easterby-Smith et al (1991) argue that there are great benefits in acting as a participant, principally because it enables a more naturalistic form of enquiry. Other people in the organisation are less likely to be affected if it is not obvious or obtrusive that there is a researcher in their midst. In the case of this research, Matthew Hall became a temporary member of Post Office Consulting and participant in their Knowledge Management activity, in order to conduct research for this thesis. Within the thesis he was referred to in his role of participant as Andrew Church. As discussed in Chapter 4, other members of the AKAP project team, although aware of the research, were not aware that this was Andrew's principle motivation for joining the project. Indeed, two of the members did not realise that he was not being paid by Post Office Consulting for his work. This indicated that he had been accepted as an 'employee' of Post Office Consulting, and this was important for having the cause for natural interaction with working colleagues.

However, conducting research in the mode of 'researcher as employee' (Easterby-Smith et al, 1991), while gaining access as an insider, is not the same as gaining an insider view (Jorgensen,

1989). Employees typically become encultured in the unique social environment of their organisations, and it is from this encultured perspective that they view the workings of the organisation. There is a danger that an employee may become too encultured to be able to view the organisation sufficiently dispassionately as a research site, or for members of the organisation not to be influenced by their existing working relationships with that employee. In Chapter 5 and earlier in this Chapter, it was noted how some of the decisions made by the AKAP Project Manager were heavily influenced by organisational politics, which in turn influenced the way other project team members viewed what they were doing. To Andrew Church, these organisational political dimensions were certainly interesting to observe, but it was because he was not fully a part of this organisational political culture that he was able to observe its evidence in other people's behaviour.

From the experience of this research therefore, there are limits to the extent to which an outsider can gain an insider view. Indeed, the research has found that in order to perform an observational role as researcher, it is appropriate and necessary that there are limits to having an insider view. While it is essential to conduct research from inside the organisation, it is nevertheless necessary to maintain an outsider's view of the organisation. This is important in order to be able to observe phenomena which may not be obvious to people who are encultured in an organisation's norms and practices. This point was noted by Whyte in *Street Corner Society* (1981) where he warns about the difficulties of passive observation when becoming an accepted participant in the society under research: Thus Whyte witnessed himself moving from a position of 'non-participating observer' to 'non-observing participant' as he became a part of the community.

This is not a claim to the objectivity associated with the positivist scientific tradition. In this mode of research the researcher is a part of the research field under investigation, and as the same person performs not only the functions of participation and observation, but also analysis and synthesis of the research findings, there is no need to pretend that a different researcher

would make the same observations and come up with the same findings. Nevertheless, in embarking upon the research process it was believed to be important that the presence of the researcher should affect or 'pollute' the research field as little as possible. In AKAP this was felt important in order to conduct minimal influence over how the project would have gone without the presence of a researcher in the team. So for example, in AKAP there were times when it appeared as if the approach was almost exclusively focused on the codification and capture of information, and that this approach was a dead-end process. However at the time it was felt that it would be more appropriate for the other participants in the project to be formulating the approach to Knowledge Management. These dilemmas were also noted by Whyte (ibid), who found himself breaking a 'cardinal rule' of participant observation by actively influencing events. By using participant observation in this research it was deemed important not to influence the direction of the KM approach too heavily, as this may have crossed the line into action research, which is not what the research set out to do.

However, it became clear in the course of the fieldwork that the fear of 'polluting' the research field, or the role of observer, with an excessive level of participation were inappropriate concerns for the methodology of participant observation. The methodology sees no conflict between the roles of participant and observer, and indeed in this case, the motive of participation was to get involved in the 'doing' of Knowledge Management in order to enable a naturalistic form of enquiry which causes minimal disruption to the research site (Easterby-Smith et al, 1991; Jorgensen, 1989). In retrospect it was inappropriate not to play a fuller part in this sense-making process, and perhaps any criticism of pollution could be in the role of researcher compromising the need to play a full part as a participating project team member. This finding does not invalidate the findings and rigour of the research itself, but is rather a reflection on the application of the research methodology.

There is one further interesting but unexpected finding about the research methodology to emerge from the research process: This is that the potential of participant observation has

become enhanced by the availability and use of new Information and Communication Technology. This would not have been apparent when Jorgensen wrote about participant observation in 1989 or Easterby-Smith et al in 1991. The potential became fully apparent in this research when participating in Post Office Consulting 'virtually' using the Lotus Notes-based TeamWeb groupware. Through TeamWeb it was possible to gain insights into the interaction between members of Post Office Consulting and members of the AKAP project team, and to be party to conversations other team members were having between themselves. With the emergence of new ICTs and groupware, there is clearly now greater potential for researchers to act as participant and observer in organisations, while making physical access less of a barrier to overcome.

In summary, therefore, there are a number of findings related to the use of participant observation as a research methodology. In terms of the insider-outsider issue, it is essential to research from the inside, but there are limits to which it is desirable to have an insider view. It is useful to come into an organisation with an outsider's perspective, although when acting as a participant it is not possible to view the process entirely objectively. As for the dual role of participant and observer, it is particularly important to ensure that the role of researcher does not compromise the role of participant in the research field. For the future there is an interesting potential to use new ICTs to enhance the possibilities of research in this mode.

10.5 Recommendations for further research

The thesis will now conclude with recommendations for further research which have been informed by the research process and findings.

The key area for further development to emerge from the research is the importance of decodification in enabling people to meaningfully and usefully interact with knowledge which has been codified. If we can understand how people are able to act upon codified knowledge and incorporate other people's knowledge into their work, this would lead us to the heart of knowledge transferability in a Knowledge Management context. The tacit-explicit typology of knowledge popularised by Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) has been useful for understanding how knowledge comes 'out' of people, but it is now recommended that the more important question to understand in a KM context is how knowledge goes 'in.' Such a focus would undoubtedly cast light on the value of codifying knowledge for Knowledge Management and on the shape which knowledge codification should take. Putting the individual knower at the centre of any conceptual approach to KM – and understanding how they are able to decodify knowledge – are the first steps towards building an urgently-needed theory for knowledge transfer in a KM context.

The development of such a theory would inevitably need to draw upon wide-ranging literatures from outside the organisational and management discourse – such as communication theory, semiotics, learning theories and presumably cognitive and behavioural psychology – as well as accounting for its standpoint in relation to other existing theories of the firm. These literatures, in addition to the insights provided by this thesis, would help to inform the further empirical research needed and the approach to data analysis.

But what does it mean to put the individual knower at the centre of a conceptual approach, and understand how they are able to decodify and act upon other people's codified knowledge?

While the black box of decodification is begging for research to open it up in order to identify the inputs and outputs to the process, research in this area will be problematic: There may be inherent limitations in examining how knowledge is decodified and internalised by people, akin to the difficulty of empirically identifying the slippery concept of a tacit dimension to knowledge.

It is therefore necessary to think practically about what can be researched, and in keeping with the methodology adopted for this research, to take a 'grounded' approach (see Chapter 4) to the building of theory from empirical insights. This research would take an essentially qualitative approach, using a range of research instruments similar to the those adopted in this thesis, particularly interviews and observations of people's work in practice. The role of participant observation in such research would depend upon the precise research questions asked and the nature of involvement of any sponsoring case-study organisation, particularly whether there are any relevant and appropriate areas of organisational work in which to participate. If the methodology of participant observation is followed, then it is recommended that the researcher works hard to ensure that the role of researcher and observer does not compromise the need to participate fully in any relevant initiative.

Therefore, while there is a longer-term aim to develop a theory for the transferability of knowledge in a KM context, it is recommended that some more short term empirical research is needed to assemble the components of such a theory. Important research questions would need to include the following:

- In terms of people's information seeking behaviour, how do people seek and make use of codified knowledge? Are there any patterns to their information use, for example, the balance between knowledge gained informally or through more formal management mechanisms, such as a KM initiative?
- In terms of how people decodify codified knowledge, what skills and approaches do different types of people use? Is it possible to account for and explain how different people decodify the same piece of codified knowledge? To what extent does the ability to decodify depend upon learning the codes, or acquiring the knowledge needed to interpret the codes? Is it possible to map out any interesting relationships between people in organisations

according to their ability to decodify knowledge similarly, for example, the existence of communities of practice?

- Where do people go to access knowledge? As forums for knowledge transfer, what are the roles of formal groups and work structures in the organisation such as project teams, compared to informal groupings, such as communities of practice?
- What patterns and influences govern the ability of people to decodify knowledge? For example, does it depend upon the nature of the information and how it is codified, and does this map on to a typology of behavioural preferences for seeking and using certain information types?
- In terms of information types, is it possible to construct a typology of knowledge which can be transferred through codification? Knowledge transferability cannot be uniform across all information types, and some information types may be more transferable than others. Such a typology may be instrumental in determining what types of knowledge it is worth codifying for the purpose of knowledge transfer. It could also take account of which aspects of context it is also necessary to codify with the information, in order to maximise the transferability of knowledge out of context.
- As for people's willingness to share their knowledge with other people in the organisation, are there certain types of relationship which are more conducive to this occurring, and are there differences in behaviour or preferences between how certain types of people codify their knowledge?

The research questions presented above map a number of areas for empirical research which would contribute to our understanding of the transferability of knowledge in an organisational context. Such an approach seeks to centralise the importance of the roles of both codification and decodification – focusing on how people are able to internalise and act upon knowledge which has been codified – rather than an approach which sets out from the perspective of what information *can* be codified. This thesis therefore recommends that the formation of such a conceptual approach, leading to the construction of an overarching theory of knowledge transfer

in a KM context, is essential if we are serious about the potential for Knowledge Management. Unless Knowledge Management practice can be moved round to emphasising how personal value is created from codified knowledge, then the potential for Knowledge Management in organisations will surely remain limited.

THE POST OFFICE

POST OFFICE CONSULTING KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT PROGRAMME 1998 - 2001

APRIL 1998				APRIL 1999				APRIL 2000				APRIL 2001			
<u>Initiatives:</u>				<u>Initiatives:</u>				<u>Initiatives:</u>				<u>Initiatives:</u>			
Organisational re-design				People				People				People			
Knowledge management subject under consideration/ study				Development Counsellors				ESIE (information overload)				Job Families			
Some initiatives being scoped				Key capabilities				Development process integration				Resourcing			
Developing a plan				Training budget growing				PRINCE and KM				Reward			
				3E interviews				7Cs and KM				Development			
				Expert panels				Toolkit developing				Training			
				Technology Forms				Journal				Accreditation			
				Communities projects				Technology				ESIE			
				CV database				Virtual library				Dialogue			
				Assignment database				Maintain CV/assignment databases, drive up access/use				Facilitation Skills			
				Electronic filing cabinet				Targetary - KPIs				PRINCE/7Cs and knowledge management			
				Virtual library								Learning Zone/Tech Forum			
				Multi-media								Journal			
				Team web								Communities (AOPM)			
												Technology			
												Virtual library			
												Electronic Filing cabinet			

Project Initiation Document

Argentina Knowledge Capture Project (AKAP)

THE POST OFFICE

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001g	18 th October 99	Version 7 (changes made by Patricia Dalrymple)
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001	28 th October 99	Final Version (as agreed by Project Board)

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1. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this Project Initiation Document (PID) is to define the terms of reference for the Project Board and to give the project a clear definition at the Initiation Stage. Consequently, the PID will establish all the key information needed to commence and manage the Project on a sound basis, communicating the necessary information to all concerned with the Project. It will give an overview of the Project, detail which Products are to be produced, who is to produce them and when they are to be produced. It provides a baseline against which the Project Manager and Project Board can control the Project.

2. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

2.1 Background

Post Office Consulting and Post Office Research Group are key knowledge businesses of the Post Office. During the past two years, various tools and techniques for knowledge capture and deployment have been developed and Bob Field, Post Office Consulting Knowledge Director, has sponsored the AKAP project to put some of those tools in to practice in support of sharing the learning gained from British Postal Consultancy Services' assignment with Correo in Buenos Aires, Argentina.

2.2 Overall Aim

The project aims to capture and deploy the key learning gained from the 'Argentina Experience' through the use of Knowledge Interviews, developed by Post Office Consulting, for knowledge capture and Knowledge Visualisation, developed by Post Office Research Group, for knowledge deployment.

2.3 Project Objectives

- To capture and deploy the key knowledge gained from the Argentina experience
- To evaluate the effectiveness of Knowledge Interviews and Knowledge Visualisation as tools for knowledge capture and deployment
- To provide a summary of the learning gained from the Argentina experience
- To make recommendations for on-going knowledge review, capture, deployment and application in Argentina
- To produce a model for future knowledge capture assignments

2.4 Strategic Fit

This project directly supports Post Office Consulting's strategic goal: "Acting as a role model for a knowledge business Post Office Consulting will be a catalyst for learning and the management of knowledge within the Post Office and its markets."

2.5 Project Scope

The full scope of the project will be defined in product 1.1 during stage I of the project. The knowledge map will provide detail of the areas for knowledge capture, audiences for deployment and people to be involved.

This project will deliver the following key deliverables:

2.5.1 Knowledge Capture

- Knowledge Map
- Knowledge Interviews
- Other interviews
- Questionnaires
- Information Document Library

2.5.2 Knowledge Deployment

- workshops
- presentations
- knowledge visualisation
- articles

2.5.3 Review & Evaluation

- Tools evaluation report for Post Office Consulting & PORG
- Learning summary report for BPCS & Post Office Consulting
- Recommendations for on-going knowledge management in Argentina
- Model for future knowledge capture assignments for Post Office Consulting

Detailed Product Descriptions for the key products are attached at ANNEX A (not included in this appendix)

2.6 External Dependencies

The success of the AKAP project is reliant upon:

- key individuals being available for interview (from Post Office Consulting, BPCS, Correo, ex-Royal Mail Division personnel and other key people identified)
- key individuals being able to locate and provide the necessary information/reports etc. required for input to the information document library for the knowledge visualisation product

2.7 Exclusions

The AKAP is a self-contained project and does not form part of the British Post Office contract and assignment for Correo, Argentina. The project will therefore not be responsible for delivering any products outside the project scope, as outlined in section 2.5.

2.8 Reporting

The Project Manager will produce regular Highlight Reports to the Project Board, as and when required, and will apply standard PRINCE reporting procedures, as appropriate.

2.9 Quality Control

The emphasis of this project is that the products should be delivered to the cost, quality and timescales agreed by the project board. The criteria that will be used to judge the success of the Project and its Products are, in priority sequence:

- The Project is delivered by 31 March 1999 (time).
- The Products are delivered to the agreed quality criteria and scope as outlined in the product descriptions (quality)*
- The Project is produced within the approved budget (cost).

*The exact quality measurements for products 1.1 and 1.5 will be determined by the project board at the end of stage 1 when the project scope and parameters will be agreed.

Where the Project Tolerance is likely to be exceeded, the Project Manager will prepare an Exception Plan which will be presented to the Project Board for approval.

2.10 Limits of Authority

The Project Manager will have the authority to control the Project within a Project Tolerance of +/- 5% for cost and the Project Board will have the authority to stop this Project at the end of any Stage.

3. BUSINESS CASE

Sponsorship and approval for the Argentina Knowledge Capture Project (AKAP) has been authorised by Bob Field, Post Office Knowledge Director.

4. PROJECT ORGANISATION

4.1 Project Information Summary

Project Title:	Argentina Knowledge Capture Project (AKAP)
Project Board Executive:	Bob Field
Project Manager:	Patricia Dalrymple
Project Manager's Tel. Number:	Removed
User Business Unit:	Post Office Consulting
Budget Code:	Removed
Total Project Costs:	59.5K*
Project Management Methodology:	PRINCE
Type of Authority Sought:	Full Authority to Proceed
Authority Level:	Director

* see Resource Plan at Annex C (not included in this appendix)

4.2 Organisation Structure

Senior Executive:	Bob Field	Post Office Consulting
Senior Users:	Carol Trotter Cynthia Houston	Post Office Consulting BPCS
Senior Technicals:	Teresa Singer John Macallan	Post Office Consulting PORG
Project Manager:	Patricia Dalrymple	
Product Manager(s):	Simon Mann	Post Office Consulting
	Andrew Church	Post Office Consulting
	Polly Johnson	Post Office Consulting
	Val Kennedy	PORG
Quality Assurance	Jane Garside	Post Office Consulting

4.3 Job Descriptions

Standard job descriptions for each of those listed in the Project Management structure above are REFERENCED to the PRINCE handbook

5. PROJECT FUNDING

5.1 Budget/Resource Plan

Allocation of budget for this project is broken down as follows:

Product	Staff Costs (£)	Non Staff Costs (£)
Knowledge Interviews	41.6K	19.3K
Knowledge Visualisation	8.7K	0.8K
Totals	50.3K	20.1K

A full breakdown of costs is provided in the Resource Plan at Annex C (not included in this appendix)

5.2 Assumptions

- The assumptions made in no particular order of importance are that:
- the Project Board will not charge for their time on the Project
 - interviewees will allow the Project Team to use and deploy their knowledge
 - all project meetings will take place in London
 - the Project Board accepts delivery/Project completion by April 2000
 - on-going deployment and communication of the project deliverables will be the responsibility of the Commercial Management Consultancy, Post Office Consulting
 - access to the information and documentation is available to the project team in electronic format
 - the majority of the learning will be derived from the tacit knowledge of the people involved with the Argentina project
 - the interviewees will be available for interview during the time period defined for stage II of the project

5.3 Risk Management

Threat	Probability	Impact	Response
Project growth/drift through too many interested parties	MEDIUM	Project drifts and project team unable to deliver spec	use PRINCE; prioritise deliverables and ensure detailed project plan
Interviewees may not be responsive to Knowledge Interviews	LOW/MEDIUM	Project Failure. Ability to evaluate knowledge capture tool ineffective	Look for alternatives for knowledge capture
Unable to interview all candidates before specified time-scale	MEDIUM	Project delayed	Re-do Project Plan with realigned time-scales
Too many people becoming involved in the Project	HIGH	Project time-scales are delayed	Ensure that a clear approval process and quality criteria are agreed
Some Project Team Members are unable to maintain a commitment to the Project	LOW/MEDIUM	Delay in Project	Can Project continue without that person? Substitute to continue work?
Expertise to conduct Knowledge Interviews/ Knowledge Visualisation cannot be found at the time needed	LOW/MEDIUM	Project delayed	Ensure Project Team are Knowledge Interview trained

Threat	Probability	Impact	Response
Information/reports etc. inaccessible or in unsuitable format	LOW/MEDIUM	Knowledge Visualisation product fails	Project board to review quality criteria for knowledge visualisation product
Resource unable to devote sufficient time to the project	LOW/MEDIUM	Knowledge Visualisation products' timescales slip	Project board to review quality criteria for knowledge visualisation product
Knowledge Visualisation product does not achieve the desired end result	MEDIUM	Knowledge Visualisation product not appropriate	Project board to consider alternative tool(s) for knowledge deployment

6. PROJECT PLAN

6.1 Project Description

The project will be delivered in 4 stages:

- Stage I
- Knowledge Map finalised and agreed by project board
- Stage II
- Knowledge Interviews, other interviews and questionnaires completed
Documentation for the Information Document Library collated
- Stage III
- Analysis and Report Writing
- Stage IV
- Deployment - workshops, presentations, articles

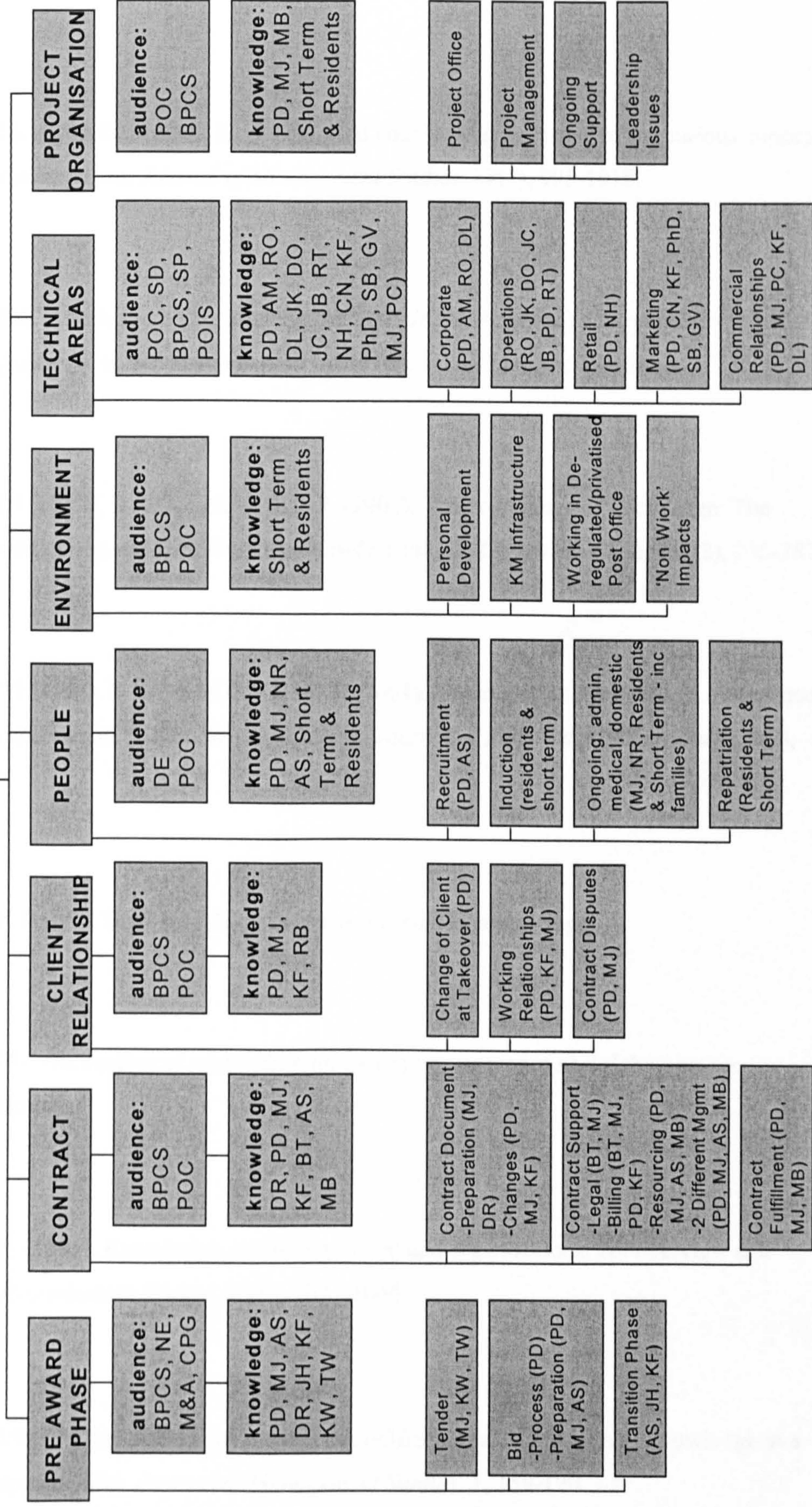
The detailed Project Plan is attached at ANNEX B (not included in this appendix)

6.2 Project Technical Plan

Detailed product descriptions are attached at ANNEX A (not included in this appendix)

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ARGENTINA KNOWLEDGE CAPTURE PROJECT
(AKAP)



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